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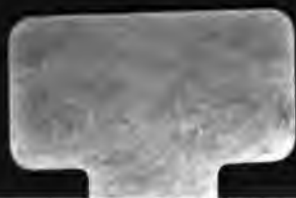
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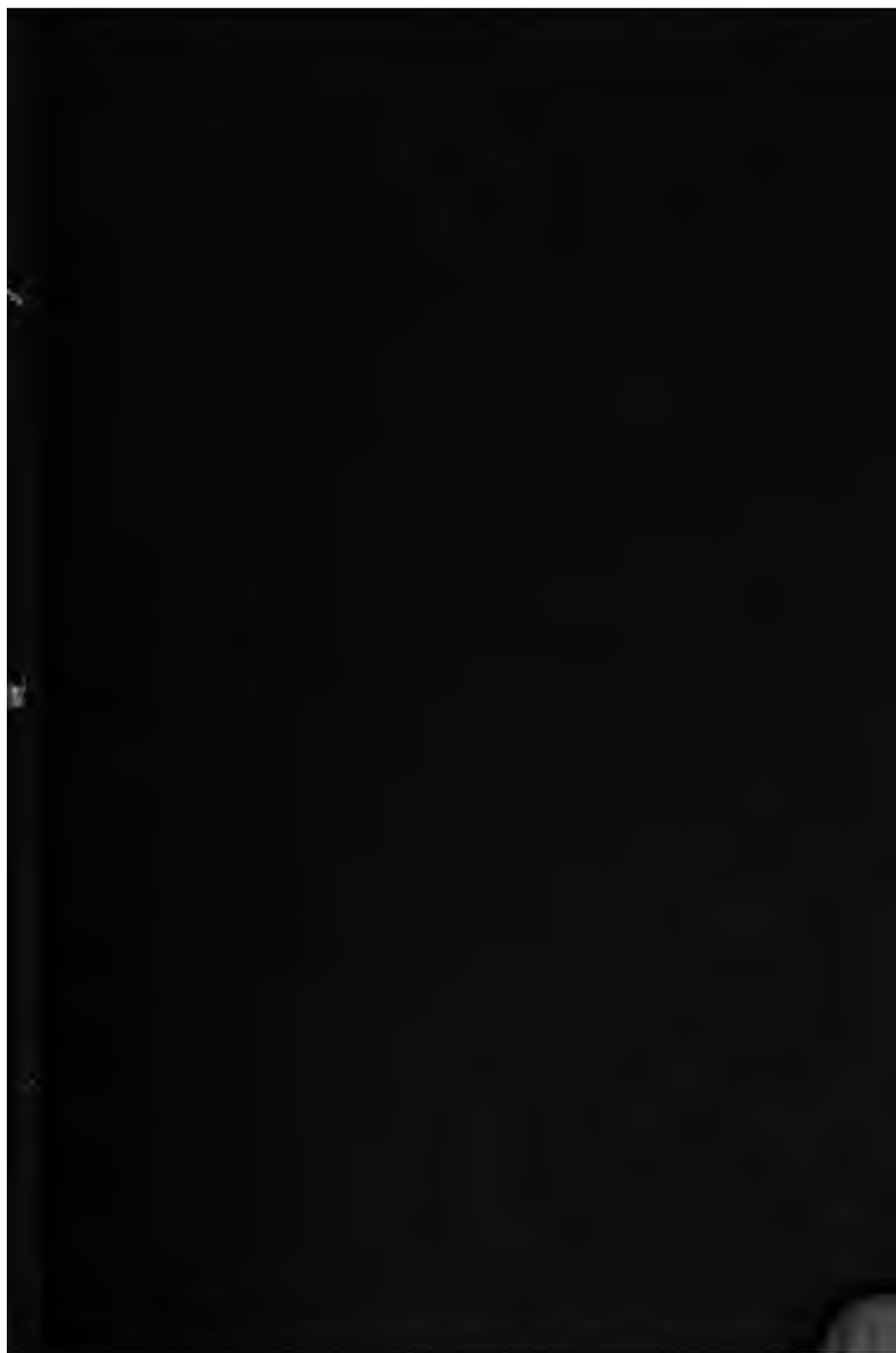


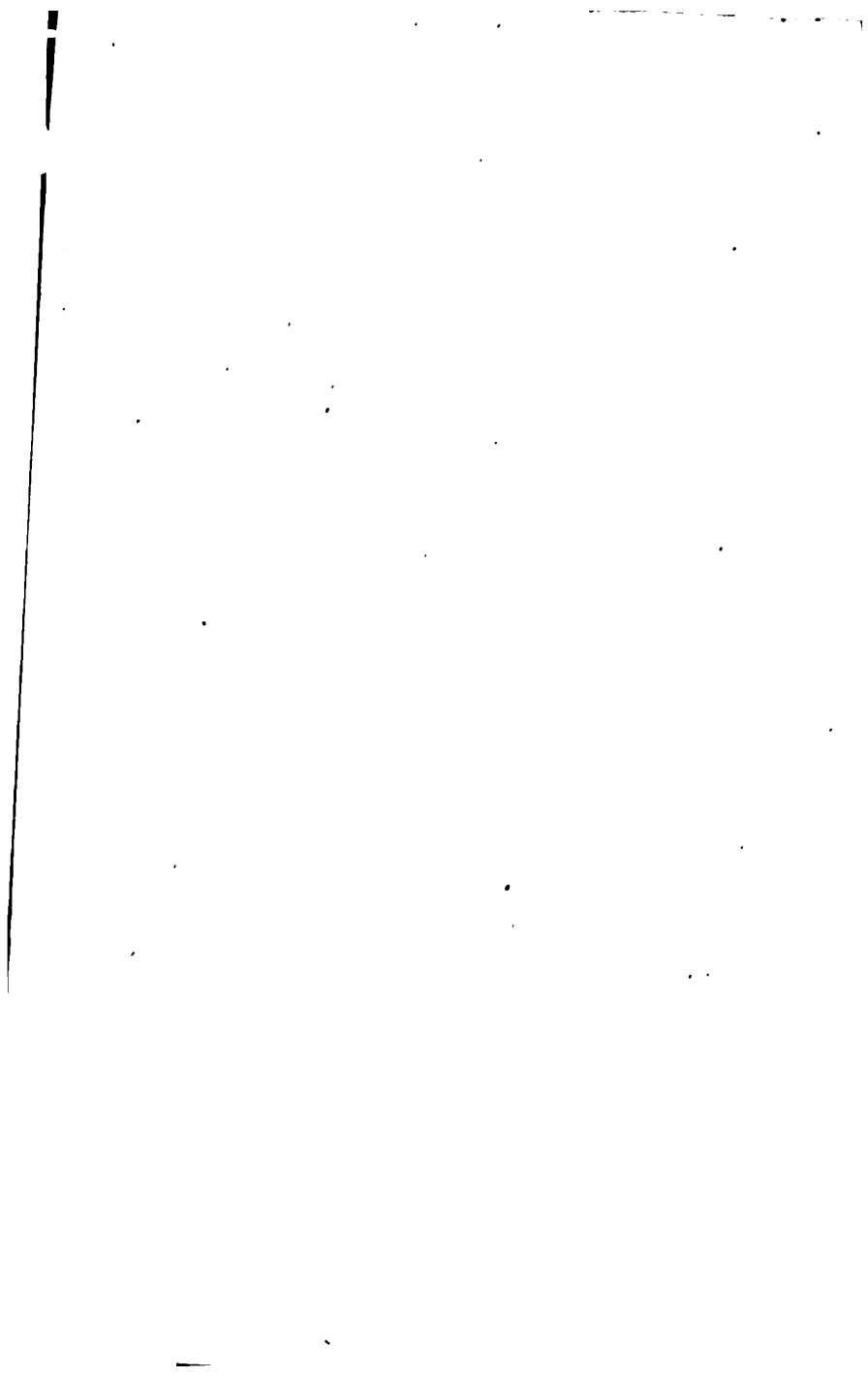




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THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.

VOL. III.

THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.

BY

KATHARINE KING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE COLONEL DID AT LAST.

AFTER Villars left, the time passed very slowly to Cecil. She had got so used to his company, so accustomed to hear his merry boyish chat, that she felt quite dull and lonely without him, and turned instinctively to some other companion during his absence. For, as before mentioned, she knew that her father was in league with the Colonel, and this, joined to what he had said on that memorable day when she had confessed her love to him, inspired her with a kind of distrust, and prevented her making him

as much her friend as she had always done before. Still the breach had apparently healed over, though each felt that the other had little secrets and reticences they did not care to expose, each also remembering a time when no such concealments existed between them.

To Cecil this seemed natural; she knew very well that the reason was because her father's views were changed, and he would disapprove many things now he would formerly have approved. But Leveston did not see the meaning of the alteration as clearly, and laying it all down to the influence Anstruther had gained over her mind, hated him more bitterly, and felt himself more aggrieved by that unfortunate man day by day.

And besides, the more clearly he saw how distasteful were the Colonel's attentions, the more plainly he perceived how little chance there was of the girl's ever returning his love, the more all his thoughts and wishes became bent on accomplishing that

design. It was a strange perversity of nature, surely. Leveston, no doubt, wished for his daughter's happiness, and thought probably he was working to secure it, whilst labouring, with all the pertinacity of a weak and obstinate man, to bring about a union in which, on her side at least, there was something the very reverse of love, something indeed very closely resembling hate.

Under these circumstances, Cecil, almost as lonely as though she had lived on a desert island, turned to Major Paget for support and companionship. Though he knew nothing of what Villars knew, still he believed the exiled man innocent, and with him, therefore, she was at ease and happy. He had not used to be a very constant frequenter of the Queen's levees, having long ago discovered that, old, moustachioed, middle-aged man as he was, there was something dangerously attractive in his young friend's beauty; and knowing well that in a competition with younger men he should have but little chance of winning and wearing the prize, he had

prudently kept himself beyond the reach of fascination, until now, in her need, his liege lady summoned him to her assistance.

If she had only known it, it was a cruel thing to do, though it may have saved her many an hour's annoyance; but he could not see the true meaning of her sudden attention, and hopes that should never have reigned there began to take possession of his heart. All the more that his youth was past, and that he had never hoped to have this happiness, did his passion blaze up fiercely when he seemed to see his day-dreams about to be fulfilled. He was, indeed, to be pitied, poor man, and Cecil, who loved and admired him as she loved her father, would have never forgiven herself had she known the mischief she wrought.

But he kept it hidden bravely, doubting, yet hoping, determined to be sure before he spoke, and not lay bare his wound till he was certain that tender hands would bind it up again. Thus day by day saw him acting the part

Villars had done, in keeping the Colonel at bay, without Villars' knowledge of facts to help him scathless through.

But when a man is bold and determined as Houston, fortune often favours him as she will not favour a less adventurous wight; and thus, at last, it came about that the Colonel got the opportunity for which he had watched and waited so long.

As usual now, Cecil rode a great deal. During the golden Autumn days she wandered for hours through the shady by-lanes round Athlone, enjoying the fresh scents of the soft, damp air, dreaming over lost times, and those happier ones she believed must be coming. One day, as she rode thus musing and castle-building along a shady path, she came suddenly upon a man sitting alone under a wide-spreading tree. At the first glance she recognized the figure, and only that she did not choose to appear flying from him, she would have turned and ridden away.

But to turn from an enemy was not in her

nature; she therefore rode quietly on, till, as she neared him, Colonel Houston—for it was he—rose, and lifting his hat, came forward to meet her. A handsome, high-born man he decidedly looked, as he stepped forward with an easy grace of movement, that, much as Cecil disliked him, had a certain charm for her eye. But though she acknowledged his personal beauty and aristocratic bearing, she feared him also, and mentally determined to pass him with a bow, though she could tell, from the manner in which he stood in the middle of the road, he intended her to speak to him. Touching Ladybird lightly with her whip, and taking her up a little on the curb, that spirited mare began a series of rearing springs forward, which had enough of the appearance of restiveness to alarm an inexperienced person, yet permitted a rider, as accustomed to them as Cecil, to preserve her composure sufficiently to bow, or even speak to a passer-by, and still afforded a reasonable excuse for not stopping altogether.

Such a show could not deceive Houston, and just as she was passing, with a cheerful "good morning, Colonel," he stepped forward, and taking her rein, brought the prancing steed to a standstill.

"Excuse me," he said, smiling to himself, as he thought how skilfully he had circumvented her, "you were riding your mare a little too much on the curb; you will find her go better on the snaffle. There—like that."

He went on, arranging the reins in her hand, and fumbling as long over the operation as he could, in order to prolong the pleasure he derived from it; whilst she, boiling over with indignation, after a minute's pause of extreme astonishment, snatched them from him, saying crossly,

"Thanks. I understand perfectly how to manage my horse, and won't trouble you any longer. It is a waste of time giving me lessons, as I have my own ideas, and will always ride my own way."

As she spoke she raised her whip, and was about to bring it down pretty smartly across

the grey's flank, when Houston caught her hand.

"Don't be in such a hurry," he implored, with an unusual softness in his voice. "I haven't had a chance of speaking to you for a long time, and I have something to say to you."

"I hope so, I'm sure," she answered, pettishly; "it ought to be something very interesting to excuse keeping me so long from my ride this lovely morning. Besides, I thought I saw you yesterday at tea, and you said nothing particular then. Can't you leave what you have to say till this afternoon? You are always so very dull at that time, it will be a pleasant change if you have anything to say."

She uttered this very spitefully, hoping thereby to frighten the man away, as she began to fear, from his pertinacity, he had made up his mind to be disagreeable. However, he only looked down, and answered, sadly,

"Indeed, I see very plainly you don't con-

sider me as amusing a companion as young Villars, or even Major Paget. If you would be a little kinder, and speak to me as you do to them, perhaps you might find me not so uninteresting. I lose heart to be amusing when I see you look so coldly on me."

She laughed a little scornfully.

"A person's power to amuse depends on the sympathy of his mind with that of the person he is addressing. There is nothing in common between your mind and mine, Colonel Houston."

The scornful laugh and words nettled him, and his face flushed angrily as he exclaimed,

"How can you trifle so when you see I am in earnest——"

"In earnest, indeed! I see it to my cost," interrupted the girl again, trying to force her steed forward, but without success. "You seem to me," she went on, "to be very much in earnest in making yourself disagreeable."

"You shall hear me!" he exclaimed, passionately, forcing the struggling horse backwards

almost on to its haunches. "You know perfectly well what I want to say, and you are determined I shan't say it; but I have a right to tell you of my love, and you must hear it! I have waited, and striven, and longed, and prayed for you, as surely no other man has ever done, and I will not have my heart thrown away as a worthless toy! Where will you find devotion such as mine again during your life? I am a cold, hard man to others—to you alone softer than wax, ready to be moulded by your hands to anything you may wish."

"Oh! Colonel Houston," here interrupted Cecil, bitterly, "this is too fine. You surely must remember how you refused a simple request of mine once, as I, being vindictive, now promise myself the pleasure of refusing yours."

"It is true," he answered, "I did so that once, but I could not help myself; and now, believe me, whilst I swear, any request or wish you may express, if it be in the bounds of human possibility, I will fulfil, if only

you will grant my prayer. It is too hard," he went on, earnestly, "that the one love of my life should be denied me. I will not, I cannot be refused. Whether you like me or not, I will wait and toil and strive for your affection, till patience and devotion win their reward at last."

"It is useless, Colonel," she answered, more gently, for she could not help pitying this man, who had wasted all his fiery heart on a delusive dream; "we can never be more to each other than we are; and I would not have it otherwise if I could, though I do truly feel sorry for you, and hope you may soon cease to grieve about this, when you see it is hopeless."

"But I must hope," he replied, vehemently. "I tell you, Cecil, when I cease to hope I shall be dead. I am not a mere youth—I know myself and my own heart, and that I feel is unchangeable. I would not pain you if I could. You are too dear to me for me not to feel your griefs as though they were my own; but though I know you hate

me, and are annoyed at my pursuit of you, I cannot cease it; and believe that my patience will be rewarded, and that I shall call you mine before I die."

"I pray not," answered Cecil, with a shudder. "An evil day it would be for me. And, Colonel, I cannot pity you as I might, when I think of the Lady Edythe."

Houston started, and a dark glow overspread his face as he answered,

"You are right; I behaved very badly to her. I can see it, and feel for her now, and this is my punishment. But what is past is past. I cannot waste my life looking back on evil deeds done, when I may look forward to fulfilling a brighter fate. Dearest, let me teach you to care for me. You know only the worst of me yet. I have been so driven to despair; but with hope and your good-will, you will see me very different. Grant me but the permission to try."

"It would be in vain, and only increase your sorrow when the time for breaking all came. Listen to me, Colonel Houston. Be-

fore God I have sworn that no word of love shall you ever win from me. And now allow me to go, I have told you what must for ever satisfy you. Let me, I beg, hear no more of this."

"Go then for awhile," he replied, loosing her rein, "but do not think I take that for an answer. A girl's oath! what is it?—one thing to-day, another to-morrow; and even were it more pure and solemn far than any human vow can be, still I must go on in the path I have begun to follow. I tell you I cannot help myself; while life remains I shall love you, and try to win you."

Scarcely listening to his parting words, she touched Ladybird and cantered away; whilst he remained standing as she left him, with wistful passionate eyes which followed her receding figure till she turned a sharp corner and was lost to sight. Then he sighed heavily, and sat down on the moss-grown root of an old tree near, burying his face in his hands, and becoming absorbed in a painful reverie. He was glad

he had spoken, though she had been so hard and unbending, he felt better even for that feeble expression of his love. It was true, as he had said, she had only seen his worst side; when he thought what he could be to her, how tender, how patient, how loving, he wondered at himself, at his harshness to his subordinates, at his unpleasantness to her; for he could not help confessing that he had been very unpleasant at times, when stung by the demon of jealousy. Yes, it was little wonder she did not like him; she had seen not one loveable quality about him, and at times he almost doubted if he had any such, save only the one of his affection for her.

And then his conduct to the Lady Edythe. He thought of it bitterly now, and could not help owning the justice of his punishment. He who had tried to make her love him had fallen into his own trap, and had worshipped this little bright-faced child almost from the first minute he saw her. And the man she had liked, and whom he

tried to supplant—at all events, his conscience did not blame him there; it was better, far better she should be separated from him at any cost, than marry one so base and mean as he.

Thus he sat as the hours rolled on, and the golden sunlight streamed through the thinning leaves, flecking the pathway before him with chequered light and shade. It was a lonely road, and none passed by that way; so the day glided away without his perceiving how it flew, until the shadows of evening began to fall around him, and the chill air warned him it was time to return.

In the meanwhile, Cecil had gone home, and her levee had passed by without Houston's appearance. She smiled as she noticed his absence, and began to hope her words that day had been definitive, and that she was at length free from his attendance. Her joy on that score, however, was not of long duration, for next day he was there again, more gentle and subdued in his manner than formerly it is true, but just as offensive to Cecil not-

withstanding; for the change only showed to her plainly how determined he was to persevere until he should gain her love, or till she should free herself from him on Anstruther's return, the only release to which she could look forward. A day or two after this, Leveston, to his daughter's great delight, proposed that they should spend a week or two at Bray. He did not care for Athlone, and thought the change would be pleasant both for him and her. Perhaps he fondly hoped the mild dissipation of strolling on the esplanade, and listening to the band, would have the effect of chasing all remembrance of Anstruther from her mind, and rendering her more amenable to his wishes; for Houston had told him all that had passed between them, adding, also, his determination not to be discouraged, but to persevere to the end. Therefore hoping the excursion might aid his plans, he proceeded with Cecil to the sea-side.

For a day or two she found it delightful, and her old friendship with her father sprang up anew when once he was removed from

Houston's influence. They had such delicious rambles together along the sea-shore, clambering into all kinds of out-of-the-way holes and corners, exploring the cliffs around the headland wherever they could venture with safety, and very often where they couldn't. Thus it happened one day, as they wandered along the top of the precipice, and close to the railway, Cecil saw in front of them a fern growing in a cleft of the rocks. It seemed to her rather a rare one, though not very pretty. The sea-fern it was, and she pointed it out eagerly to her father, showing also a slight path along the face of the cliff, that wound round an angle, and then out again towards the place where the plant she wished for grew. By following that path it seemed to her they could secure the treasure, which would be all the more valuable if purchased by a little risk.

It is true the way she pointed out was little more than a mere goat-track, and overhung the precipice which sloped in beneath them, leaving only the foam-crested

breakers visible below ; but they had both good heads, and, moreover, had been getting into so many difficulties and dangers the last few days, that they had accustomed themselves to think very little of the peril they were incurring.

No sooner had they determined to obtain possession of the fern than they began creeping in that direction along the track already mentioned, which at first was easy enough, but grew more and more difficult as they advanced. Leveston was in front, and got on very well till within a few yards of the coveted prize, when the piece of rock on which he was standing gave way suddenly under him, and before Cecil's agonized eyes he seemed precipitated into the sea. When the dust caused by the fall of so much rubbish and débris floated away, the girl, creeping carefully forward, and looking over, saw her father's body lying on a ledge of rock below, and about midway between her and the sea.

For some seconds she gazed in fascinated horror, incapable of speech or movement. Then

a cry burst from her lips, so long, and shrill, and despairing that the very sea-birds floating on wide-spread wings around her head flew away hurriedly, and a thousand muffled echoes from every cliff and cavern repeated the sound in multiplied reverberations. But the tones had hardly died away into silence when Cecil, still watching, perceived, or thought she perceived, a motion in the body below; and then heard a voice, faint, certainly, but still her father's well-known voice, exclaim,

"Is that you, Cecil? I have hurt myself, I am afraid, and cannot get near you; but perhaps, if there is a way down, you might help me."

"Wait a minute till I see, papa, dear," cried the girl, full of courage and activity, now she knew her father still lived, and that she might be of use.

Creeping very carefully along to the spot where the slip had taken place, she found that it might be possible for her to let herself slide down with her face to the cliff, stopping herself here and there by catch-

ing at projecting pieces of rock. It never occurred to her that her getting down would be of no manner of use unless she could manage to ascend again, and felt quite pleased when, scratched and bruised, she arrived at her father's side. Then she saw clearly that he was incapable of moving without help, and that, too, more help than she could render. He was fearfully battered and injured, one large stone still resting on his chest, which he had not strength to remove. This, at least, she could do for him, though it was as much as her little might could accomplish, and she almost dreaded to touch it, for fear of causing him additional pain. She lifted it, however, and then looked round to see if there was anyone in sight to whom she could signal, and from whom she might receive assistance.

On the land side nothing met her view but frowning cliffs—they were even out of sight of the railway; while at sea, far as eye could reach, the blue waters were dotted with white-sailed boats, beautiful to look at

at any other time, but now causing her to feel more keenly the utter loneliness of her position. They were so far away that any sign she might make could only pass unnoticed. "I must try to get back and go for help myself," she thought.

"Papa, dear, let me put this coat over you, to shelter you from the sun," she said, "whilst I go and call some one to assist me in getting you home. You won't mind my leaving you for a few minutes, will you, dear?"

"No," he answered, faintly. "I think you'd better, only don't be long."

She turned to look for some place where she might ascend the cliff; and then began to think perhaps she had promised what she might not be able to perform, in offering to seek help. The spot where she had slid down so easily offered no facilities for ascent. She tried again and again, but without success, only cutting and bruising herself more and more with every effort. Suddenly, some way up the cliff, she perceived a figure standing. It was that of a man looking

round him, as though searching for something. She could attract his attention, she thought, and drawing out her pocket-handkerchief, she began waving it wildly, shouting as she did so.

During all this Leveston lay as one dead, his heavy breathing being the only sign of life about him. Again and again she shouted, and waved her fluttering white signal on high, but for some time without success, the dashing of the surf on the rocks below overpowering the sound of her voice. At length, however, the man seemed to see her, for he flourished his hat around his head, and gave an answering shout. A deep feeling of thankfulness took possession of Cecil's heart as she stood for one minute to watch him clambering downwards, and then turning again to her father, raised his head, and wiped the moisture from his forehead, whilst waiting for the help she knew would be with them ere long. In a few minutes the sound of approaching footsteps was heard, scraping their way over the interposing boulders, and then,

looking up with eager anticipation Cecil saw before her anxious eyes the dark face of Colonel Houston. She was in too great trouble to be astonished, but called out quickly, "Don't come down here. You won't be able to get back if you do. Seek help first, and then come and take us out of this."

"Is your father much hurt?" he inquired, pausing, and preparing to return as she told him.

"I fear he is," she answered sadly, "so bring a doctor with you too—only be quick. Every minute spent thus is bad for him."

Without another word Houston turned and went, leaving Cecil thankful certainly for his opportune appearance, but wondering, now she had time to think of it, how he came to be there, when she had supposed him at Athlone.

"Am I dreaming?" asked her father, faintly, after a few minutes. "I thought I heard Houston's voice just now."

"So you did, dear," she answered. "He was

here, and has gone to get help. We will have you home presently."

"He is a very good fellow," Leveston went on, the ruling idea still strong even in his weak state. "I wish you could get to look on him favourably, Cecil—it would make me happy when I am dying to think I had left you well provided for."

"Don't talk of such things, papa, dear," she replied, kissing his forehead; "I hope that time is many years distant yet; and who knows what may have happened then? I may be a respectable old maid."

She tried to speak cheerfully, though her heart was very sad; and her father's mention of death now, when he lay so motionless and helpless in her arms, filled her with gloomy forebodings. He said no more then, and seemed to have fainted, so she sat silent, heavy tears falling noiselessly from her eyes, thinking how slow they were in coming. She was sure she could have done it so much faster; and he might be dead before help arrived.

At length she perceived a boat making for the cliff, at the point where they were, and waved her handkerchief again as a signal, to show them the spot; whilst at the same time a party of men with ropes, and everything needed for lowering them down, appeared above. In a few minutes Houston was beside her.

"Poor fellow!" he said, stooping over Leveston, who never opened his eyes, but lay, to all appearance, insensible; "he does seem badly hurt. Mr. Meredith," he added, turning to a man who had followed him, and whom Cecil took to be a surgeon, "how had we better move him?"

"The boat is ready," answered the surgeon, looking over. "See, he could be lowered from this point almost straight into it. We had better make a hammock of one of those blankets. Lay him in it, and let him down that way. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, it seems the best," answered Houston.

And forthwith they set to work. Everything was soon ready; then the injured man

being tenderly lifted and laid in the hammock, it was slung carefully over the cliff. The boatman received it at the bottom, and transported him to the boat. Then Cecil made the descent the same way, and took her place, with her father's head resting in her lap. Houston and the surgeon followed, and presently they were on their way back to Bray. Mr. Meredith pronounced no opinion on Leveston until he had examined him on his return to his own lodging, when he gave it as his decision to Houston that the internal injuries were very severe, and that the patient would never entirely recover them, though he might get well enough to linger for some years in precarious health. This, however, they neither of them communicated to Cecil, who passed her time by her father's bedside, nursing him with a devotion that allowed her no respite by night or day.

"This won't do," the doctor remarked, after a few visits; "my poor child, you will wear yourself out, and not be able to look after him when he gets better

and wants you more. Take my advice; have a nurse in—indeed, I will send one—and give yourself rest and regular exercise. I will speak to your friend here, to see that you follow my prescription.”

So Cecil was quietly placed under Houston's supervision, which, if she had been in her usual spirits, she would have resented, but now submitted to without a word of remonstrance; whilst his heart swelled with hope as he thought that at last fortune had indeed favoured him, and he was going to have everything his own way.

“Were you not surprised to see me that day?” he asked, the first time he found her in the sitting-room when he called to inquire for Leveston. “I ought, perhaps, to explain to you how it was.”

“I don't think it needs explanation,” the girl answered, with a faint smile; “it is an accepted fact—a very fortunate one, too, for us, and I thank you from my heart for the assistance you rendered that day. I shall be for ever grateful to you.”

"Grateful," he repeated impatiently, "I hate gratitude; everyone is grateful—even your worst enemy, if you happened to serve him, would be so. Haven't you something more to offer me as a reward for my patient following at a distance wherever you moved? I couldn't live at Athlone after you left, so came here, and used to roam out in the direction in which you walked, in hopes that, unseen by you, I might myself have the pleasure of meeting you at least once or twice a-day. I had been very near you for several days before, though neither of you were aware of it, and this is how it was I was close enough to be of service to you when you stood in need of help. Won't you say something kinder to me than you have said before, now that you know how it all happened?"

But she turned away her head sadly.

"How can I thank you in any way you would care about, except in the one way I will not do. Why do you still cherish this vain dream, which I have warned you can never

be fulfilled ? You only pain yourself and me. I can thank you in no better way than by begging you to leave me; and I, when my father is better, will try to persuade him to exchange, so that you may be free from my presence, which stirs up such vain hopes in you."

"No, not that, I implore!" the Colonel cried, eagerly. "Besides, your father knows of my suit, and favours it. It would please him if you would grant my prayer, and surely that ought to have some influence with you."

"If I loved," she answered, "and if my father approved my love, it would make me very happy; but his approval of one for whom I cannot care could never prevail on me to accept that man. Oh! Colonel Houston, I am so sorry to wound and pain you; you have done more for me than any other man has yet done, and still, in spite of all, I must give you the same answer I did when we last spoke on this subject."

She turned and left the room, wondering how she could ever convince this man that his pertinacity was in vain, and that, in spite of

her father's sanction, she could never do as he wished.

Very slowly Leveston recovered. The mass of rock falling on his chest had injured his lungs, as the doctor had feared; and though Cecil knew it not, it was very doubtful that his life would be much prolonged. Still he rallied wonderfully, and though the blush in his cheek was only the hectic glow of fever, and the gaiety of his spirits arose from the same cause, still his daughter was satisfied with it, and fancied he was getting quite strong again. At length, when he began to move about by the help of a stick or Cecil's arm, the Colonel returned to Athlone, and resumed his command, which had devolved on Major Cardew during his absence.

Leveston's leave, which had originally been for a fortnight, had afterwards been extended on account of his accident; but now that he had regained a little strength, he expressed a wish to return, and Cecil, glad to please him in any way, professed herself delighted with the

idea of getting back to the regiment—as indeed she was.

By this time Leveston had begun to feel that the injuries he had received were such as left him a very frail tenure of life; and he became feverishly impatient to forward the match he had designed for his daughter, for fear death might overtake him before the plan he had arranged for her happiness was executed.

“Cecil, darling,” he would say to her, now and then, “you have been a very good daughter to me; let that comfort you when I am gone. But, oh! my child, I cannot bear to leave you, so young and unprotected, in this dangerous world. It is my one trouble in going, for life has not been too bright to me, and, but for you, I should rejoice to leave it.”

“Don’t say so, dearest,” she would murmur, throwing her arms round him. “I could not bear you to leave me; and you will live for my sake, I know. I have not been half good enough to you, but I’ll try and be better in future; only don’t talk so gloomily, it hurts me to hear you.”

"It's true, darling, notwithstanding," he would reply, "though I wouldn't pain you by talking of it, only I wish to tell you how happy you could make me by doing one thing for me before I go. I wouldn't ask you to do it now," he went on, "but just before I leave you. I should die in peace then."

"What is it, papa? I'll do it if I can; anything to make you happy—only I won't believe you are so bad as you think."

"Well, I won't claim the fulfilment of your promise until the time comes, so we'll talk no more about it at present. You have given me great comfort, dearest; I hope you will be rewarded for it, by leading a happier life than I have done."

About this time the detachments were all coming in; but, as Villars had foretold, his was the last to arrive—indeed was not expected in till the next day.

"Then," thought Cecil, weary with the monotony of her life for the past two months, "we shall have some fun again. I shall be

anxious to hear how he got on in those out districts."

Thinking thus, she took up the paper to beguile a lonely hour, and, to her astonishment, almost the first paragraph on which her eye fell was the following :—

"APPROACHING MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.—It is rumoured in the higher circles of London society that a marriage has been arranged between the Lady Edythe Vavasour, eldest daughter of the Earl of Mountfalcon, and the Marquis of Lemington, late first Lord in Waiting to Her Majesty."

Cecil let the paper fall from her hands, and remained gazing before her in a stupefied manner for some minutes. The Lady Edythe who had seemed so passionately attached to Houston but a few short months before—whose wild prayer for help in regaining her love had so often crossed the little Queen's mind with accusing distinctness—could she have forgotten it all in so short a time, and turned to some

newer flame? Indeed it seemed so, and yet it was most incomprehensible; she was so little like a fickle, changeable girl. Then the man to whom she was about to be married. Cecil thought she had heard the name before, and tried to recollect which of the London youths she had seen hovering round the beautiful Lady Edythe was the owner of the title. For a long time she could not remember, but suddenly the whole thing flashed across her mind. She recollected the cross, gouty old man who was always to be seen hanging about Lady Mountfalcon's party, wrinkling his yellow face into the hideous semblance of a smile whenever the Lady Edythe turned to speak to him, and following her with his eyes whenever she passed him in the dance, an amusement in which his age and infirmities forbade him to join.

"I suppose he loves her," she mused, "but how she can do it I cannot imagine."

The riddle was solved for her sooner than she had expected, the next post bringing her

a letter in a strange handwriting. She opened it, and found it run as follows:—

“DEAR MISS LEVESTON,

“Do you remember my coming to you once to help me, when I thought myself in trouble? You do, no doubt, and because of that appeal to you, will wonder at the news the papers are now announcing to the world concerning me. But don't blame me too soon, or think me heartless in the matter. You know what I begged of you then, and I feel certain you tried to do it; but he and fate were stronger than you. I was forgotten, and I hear now that, happier than I was, or ever can hope to be, you are about to become his wife. I have still strength enough left to congratulate you, you see, and hope you may be happy, as I can never be. All I would ask of you now is never to betray this or my other confidence to your husband, who will not know how deep my wound was, when he next meets me as the Marchioness of Lemington. Don't pity

me, child, but thank Heaven you have escaped my fate. Yours ever,

“EDYTHER VAVASOUR.

“Let us meet again some day, but don’t bring your husband with you.” .

“What can she be thinking of?” mused Cecil, as she finished this extraordinary letter. “She must imagine I am going to marry Colonel Houston. I had better write and tell her her mistake at once.”

And so she did, receiving an answer a few days afterwards. There were only a few short words in it, and they were blurred with the writer’s tears; but they spoke volumes to Cecil’s tender heart, and if she had needed to be strengthened in her resolution they would have done so. The note ran thus :—

“DEAR FRIEND,

“I have been deceived. Your letter came too late. Think as well of me as you can.

“EDYTHER VAVASOUR.”

And this was the end of the romance which she had watched with careless eyes until drawn into it by circumstances. She thought of the beautiful girl with real pity, but imagined henceforth their paths were far apart, and soon dismissed the subject from her mind, reverting to the more exciting, and, to her, more closely interesting news that Villars had communicated to her on his return.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE ELECTIONS.

VILLARS had returned a day or two before Cecil received the note mentioned in the last chapter, and of course she had seen a good deal of him. He came in late one evening, and called early next morning before the usual hour, securing thereby a very pleasant tête-à-tête, as Leveston, still weak from the effects of his accident, had not yet left his room.

"Well, how did you get on, and had you much roughing?" she inquired the first time she saw him. It seemed to her there was a change about Villars, though what it was, at first she couldn't exactly make out.

"I had a splendid time, at least a good part

of the while I was away," he answered; and again the alteration struck her. He seemed, though glad to see her and very pleasant, to be thinking of something else. After a pause, however, he collected his thoughts and went on: "Oh, Queen! how shall I ever describe to you the scenes on the polling-day at these most horrible elections? Don't I wish that some of those who lower the suffrage so graciously from their high places on the hustings could be obliged to stand motionless, as we are, hour by hour, amidst a mob of yelling devils, insulted and goaded with every injurious epithet that can raise the human heart to fury, and very lucky if we haven't to submit to bodily ill-treatment too, all in the same passive manner; and if by some great and wonderful piece of good fortune the civil power is up to its business and determined to put down rioting, then what an outcry is raised if one of the great unwashed gets a little hurt by the storm he assisted in raising. In these times the motto seems to be, 'Down with education, intelligence, and talent, and up with ignorance, brute force, and

violence.' If a man is nobler and more upright than his fellows, determined to flinch neither in word nor deed in what he knows to be his duty, then the whole set of human wolves are let loose on him, and he is maltreated and abused, lucky indeed if he escape with his life. The authorities now-a-days screen this; it is only the lowest of the mob—those who go in boldly for murder, rack, and ruin—that are deemed worthy of protection; and we, placed under the civil power, must uphold deeds that we abhor, and refuse succour to those who, perhaps, are being murdered for want of it within arm's length of us. I tell you it is so, Queen. Here, in this country we are accustomed to think so peaceable, scenes are enacted on these occasions, and sanctioned by people that might put a stop to them, that call for the vengeance of God on a land where such things can be. I would I had a pen of fire, to write of the evil deeds I have seen wrought, and expose them through the land, so that conscientious though misguided men might discover what it was they were upholding; for these things don't find their

way into the papers, or if they do at all, the statement of facts is slurred over so much that few recognise their importance. Sometimes, as I have known it, a false signification is put on them altogether, in order that guilt may be shielded, and the reign of violence go on as before. I could tell you of clubs in brawny hands used to batter in the skulls of defenceless voters who dared think for themselves; of curses hurled from priestly lips on those more timid men who dreaded curses; of destruction and devastation following those who had the courage to withhold their votes, their houses wrecked, their wives and children menaced, themselves when caught fearfully maltreated and left for dead, or, if fortunate enough to escape falling into the hands of the mob, obliged to save their lives by flight; of household servants stabbed and wounded, because they belonged to a family of different principles. All this I have seen lately, and more. The blood of men deliberately murdered—peaceable, upright, unoffending men—cries aloud from all parts of this miserable country for vengeance on

the people that commit, the government that allows such crimes. For it is a known fact, and has been heard not only once, but repeated again and again, that the mob count on the assistance of the authorities to screen them ; they have been heard to say, 'Oh ! we can do as we like now ; we have the government on our side, and we'll be let off, no matter how we act.' This is a fact, and one of which it would be well the government was made aware, though after having sanctioned what has already passed, it is perhaps hopeless to expect that any knowledge of the wickedness it upholds will induce it to withdraw its protection from that class. Mob law no doubt serves its end, and it is folly to think the government was not perfectly acquainted, long ere this, with what goes on under its rule. Strange things indeed I have seen and heard since I last saw you ; in fact, my head has been so bewildered with atrocities that some of those deeds which struck me as most dreadful when I first heard of them, have now escaped me altogether. Imagine peaceable Protestant farmers, willing to vote with their landlords if unmolest-

ed, having their houses broken into at dead of night, themselves tied leg to leg like cattle, thrown upon carts or cars, and carried away to some hiding-place, where they were dragged on the polling day, and brought up to swell their enemies' ranks; or in places where it was not convenient to pursue such a system, imagine the house of one of the same class of people surrounded, the wretched occupant brought out, and with a pistol at his ear forced to swear that he would vote for the candidate named by the priest. Freedom of election indeed! the glorious watchword of our country, about which radical orators prate so largely. I agree with them, it would be a fine thing if we had it, and one that would in many places alter the aspect of affairs for them; but to call the iniquitous scheme of violence and intimidation we have lately been authorised to support—to call that, I say, freedom of election, is not irony, or a farce, as, if the evils practised were less serious, it might be called, but absolute, deliberate, and wicked perversion of the truth."

"You seem indeed to have felt very strongly

on the matter," interposed Cecil gently. "That things could be in such a state in a civilised country, seems to me almost incredible; and, besides, we being at Bray saw nothing of it."

"No," he said, "none but those brought in contact with the actual disorders can realise them. The picture I have given you falls far short of the realities I witnessed in that little country town; words seem to have no power to express the horror that seized on one, at seeing day by day acts of violence perpetrated, unheard-of in their dastardly malignity, and yet allowed to pass totally unpunished, without even a reprimand or a remonstrance, because the chief civil power was one of their own party, a radical, and used all his authority to shelter brutality and wrong, instead of suppressing it. The only thing that gives me satisfaction in looking back on that time is the thought that one of the blackguards, at least, felt the weight of my arm in such a fashion as I sincerely trust has given him a headache ever since. It happened this way: we were drawn up in the street, in the very centre of a hooting,

yelling mob, who were amusing themselves by pelting us with stones, dirt, cabbage stalks, and every other missile they could lay hands on. The police, I believe, also came in for their share of these little attentions, but about this I wasn't very sure, as I was taken up watching the performances of a tall and very ill-looking ruffian near me. He wielded a club of great size and weight, which he had brought down upon several voters' heads, with a force that leads me to suppose more deaths must have resulted from those elections than we have any idea of, thick as the skulls of the lower order no doubt are. Several times seeing him doing this, I would have given a thousand pounds for permission to act for one minute as I thought fit; and had I got that leave, I should have felt greater pleasure in cutting down that cowardly villain, who only dared use his weapon on the defenceless, than in sabreing a Russian grenadier, who at least has bravery, and obedience to duty, to ennoble him. Presently the rough's eye fell upon me. Soldiers are fair game to the mob, they are forbidden to defend themselves,

and then the officers at least occupy the position of gentlemen ; attacking them, therefore, is a safe way of venting their spleen on the upper classes. I was watching him, as I have said, and no doubt my face expressed very plainly what I was longing to do, for leaving the occupation that had been hitherto entertaining him, the brute approached me, seized me by the leg, and tried to hoist me out of the saddle ; intending, no doubt, I should be trampled or beaten to death on the other side ; crying, as he tried to unseat me, 'Off with him, boys ! Down with the bloody villain of a red coat !' Fortunately for me, the boys on the other side were busy murdering some one else, or I should have had no chance ; as it was, I kept my saddle, and gave him the best blow I ever dealt in my life, right across his face, seconding it before he could get away with another on the head, which dropped him like an ox. I could only use the flat of my sabre, or it would have been the last chance he would ever have had of assaulting a soldier, but it gave him enough ; his figure head was pretty well spoilt, I think, and he had to be carried off

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by his comrades, being too dizzy to walk. And this, I do believe, in all that fearful scene of violence and misrule, was the only bit of justice dealt out to any of those scoundrels, and that it is that riles me. That there should be great excitement, and perhaps violence, is natural ; but that deeds of bloodshed and crime like those I have mentioned should go unpunished, surely betokens something very false and rotten in the governing power. Talk of our Constitution!—call it the best in the world, and all that stuff! Why, if we cool, fault-finding John Bulls went into any other land on the face of the earth, and found ourselves in such a pandemonium, such a holiday of everything false, and cruel, and wicked, we should soon have an account of it in every paper in the country, wondering at the corruption of the government that allowed such a state of affairs, and holding up ourselves as models to that and all other nationalities. I declare I have been giving you a lecture on the subject,” he added, stopping himself suddenly, “and you look quite grave about it ; and well you might, if my

words could give you an adequate idea of the horrors of such a time ; whereas I feel as if they very faintly expressed what I would wish to convey. We were a week or two in that town," he went on, "being stationed there first for the borough election ; afterwards we were moved up the country, to protect voters during the county contest, and were billeted at the different gentlemen's houses about. That was the pleasantest part of our duty for many reasons, and partly because, being under the orders of gentlemen magistrates, instead of the Radical snobs of the town, we were more sure of being allowed to be of use in case any uproar calling for our intervention arose. Brabazon and I had very good billets, and enjoyed ourselves immensely. I have lots to tell you of our adventures in the far west, but haven't time now. I appointed to meet Ainslie at one o'clock, so will wish you good-bye till the afternoon. By-the-by, how is the Colonel now ? He didn't seem very pleased at my return last night, I thought, and I suppose, if he had any possible pretext for so doing, would have kept me away longer."

"We get on better," she answered; "but, though he was very kind to us when my father met with that dreadful accident I daresay you heard about, and, though we are very good friends, I cannot bring myself to think well of him; he showed us such a bad side of his character at first, and indeed he's not much better now."

As he walked away Villars was able, from that little speech, to conclude that, in spite of the devotion he had displayed, and his real kindness when she was in distress, the hard-hearted Queen of the Regiment was no more inclined to make the Colonel happy now in the way he wished than she ever had been before.

CHAPTER III.

VILLARS GETS MARRIED AND DONE FOR.

BRABAZON, Villars, and several others, just in from detachment duty, assembled in the little Queen's drawing-room that afternoon, very well pleased to meet again in that snug retreat, and draw each other out on the wonderful adventures and people with whom they had met during their sojourn in the back districts of this wild isle.

"Has Villars been telling your Majesty what he has been doing, and how he has been amusing himself the last few weeks?" inquired Brabazon of Cecil.

She looked at Villars doubtfully, and perceived that he was very red, but answered in all good faith,

"He has told me his sentiments on the way elections are managed in this country, and he expressed himself very strongly; but it didn't seem to me he was amused by them—rather the reverse."

"He couldn't have expressed himself one bit too strongly," replied Brabazon. "I can't fancy any man, who had been obliged to stand by and witness scenes such as we have had to mount guard over, ever being a Radical. However," he went on, checking himself and changing the subject abruptly, "I'm not going to talk politics, I've had a sickener of them; and it seems to me this young gentleman has not confessed to your Majesty; therefore, as I think it right he should make a clean breast of it, I'll spare his blushes, and do it for him."

"I was going to tell you, of course," put in Villars, "only I hadn't time this morning; and I say, Brabazon, you'd best draw it mild, or you'll have to look out for squalls."

"Thanks for the warning," answered the laughing Captain, turning again to Cecil, and going on: "Yes, Queen, it's *boná fide* and very

serious, I do assure you. You behold before you a cornet minus his heart, not, I must observe, that that is a very uncommon thing among cornets, but then it is not often such a desperate, head-over-ears affair as this."

Villars sat so quiet during this, and drank his tea with so much composure, that Cecil looked at him to see if the accusation brought against him could really be true. He was crimson certainly, to the very tips of his before-mentioned ears, but that was the only sign of confusion he manifested; so Cecil, with a girl's natural interest in a love-affair, inquired,

"And who is the enchantress?"

"A daughter of our host. But first I must tell you; we were billeted on a Mr. James, living at a place called Woodville, near the little town of Ballyweston. They were very pleasant, good-natured people, and treated us very well, though I'm sure it must have been a bore to them, being obliged to entertain strangers, as our host was ill at the time from injuries received in the riots. They were, moreover, a very large family; but the one of whom I must

“speak is the cause of our friend’s abstraction ever since his return.”

“I don’t think he has been very abstracted,” answered Cecil, unable to make out whether the whole affair was a joke, or whether Brabazon was really in earnest, and the volatile sub caught at last.

“It’s true,” said Brabazon, “though I see you don’t half believe it. You must know she really is a very pretty girl; plays well, dances and rides beautifully, besides having plenty of fun in her when you come to know her. Rather reserved at first, I fancy, though Villars was not long in surmounting that barrier. We arrived there earlyish in the day, and in an incredibly short space of time he found out this young lady’s attractions; for when she went out in the afternoon to ride, he waited in the avenue for her return, and was so successful as to meet her, though at first, being rather reserved, as I have said, she didn’t give him much encouragement. We had very bad weather, too, part of the time we were there; and you would have been amused to see Villars

trying to raise compassionate feelings in the young ladies' hearts by walking from one window to the other before breakfast, rubbing his hands, and saying, 'Pity poor little me, who will have to be out all day in this rain. Isn't it a hard fate?' appealing to the pretty Miss Emily. 'I'm accustomed to this kind of thing,' she would reply, laughing, 'and can't feel for you as much as I ought. I shall go out to ride to-day, I know.' 'Oh! I wouldn't mind it at all,' he would answer, 'if I was riding with you; the wetting would be a pleasure in such company, but escorting voters is quite a different matter.' Then she would look at him out of her splendid hazel eyes (she has particularly fine eyes), with a look that seemed to say, 'You mean that for a compliment, but I'm not going to take it;' and would go on, 'Yes, I daresay the voters are not an interesting class; but, at any rate, it ought to comfort you, knowing that you are performing the praiseworthy act of saving those poor people's heads from being broken.' I am afraid, indeed, during those two weeks, Villars conducted himself more like

a schoolboy let loose than like a responsible and well-conducted officer in Her Majesty's service. Even the object of his adoration was not safe from his mischievous pranks, when he brought a cat, a kitten, and a mouse that the cat had caught, into the drawing-room, in order that he might have the pleasure of seeing how animals of that species teach their young to kill their game."

"I didn't bring them in," interrupted Villars, vehemently; "I told Miss James I'd like to see it, and she brought them."

"Comes to much the same thing, doesn't it, Queen?" asked Brabazon. "The guest expresses a wish to see the thing done; the hostess supplies him with the form of amusement he desires. Miss Emily, having a horror of mice, and not altogether entering into the spirit of the thing, sits crouched up on a chair, carefully preventing either her garments or her feet from touching the ground, while the dashing cornet, of the —th terrifies each of the ladies in turn by threatening to put the formidable animal, which he has succeeded in catching,

on to them. It was a grand scene, I assure you, and amused me very much. It showed the sportive qualities of the British soldier in their fullest development; and I couldn't help wondering what Villars' fertile brain would next devise as a recreation."

"It was great fun, I assure you," asserted Villars, stoutly; "only, of course, I wouldn't have frightened Miss Emily so much if I had known it; she was so plucky, and kept so quiet, that it wasn't until I looked at her I knew what she felt. I wouldn't do it again, now I know her dislike to those vermin; and once I perceived it, I very soon let the cat and her kitten demolish the beast. I'm not as hard-hearted as he tries to make me out; am I, Queen?"

"You've always been very good before me, I must say," she answered; "but your Captain's stories of you show a phase of your character which has never come under my notice. I think men in talking of each other always exaggerate evil."

"Only copying the ladies in that," laughed

Brabazon. "Commend me to a woman for touching up an enemy neatly in a few words."

"That's because their command of language is so much greater than yours," answered Cecil; "they don't think more evil, but they express what they do think forcibly and well."

"Under those circumstances, I had better not provoke your Majesty to state what you think of me," replied Brabazon; "but I'm sure Villars wants his wickedness put before him in clear feminine language, if ever any man did, so pray pitch into him."

"I haven't had any very bad deeds clearly proved against him," she answered; "the charges are, susceptibility, effeminacy, and cruelty to his lady friends in exciting their fears. They're all bad accusations, but have not been conclusively proved, and only his own confession can condemn him; but then I can't expect him to confess before everyone, so come in this evening after mess, and take tea with us, Villars, then you can tell me all about it."

"Nothing will please me better," he replied,

rising to take leave. "Don't let Brabazon be too hard on me when I'm gone."

"I don't tell tales out of school, so you're safe," the Captain called after him; "the more that I am going too." He rose and left as he spoke, and the rest soon followed his example, leaving Cecil laughing over what she had heard, and waiting impatiently to be told the true version in the evening.

Punctual to his appointment, the young fellow dropped in after mess, and found Cecil sitting by the fire working, her father fast asleep on the sofa. He was still far from strong, and had fallen into many of the habits of an old man since his illness; amongst which an after-dinner nap was one.

Villars sat down without disturbing him, looked at Cecil's work, asked what it was called, studied the movements of her busy fingers as though he had some thoughts of learning it himself, and exhibited several other signs of nervousness. Cecil, rather amused at seeing these symptoms in her usually self-possessed friend, did not attempt to help him, but waited

for him to begin his confessions without her aid. At last, after an immensity of fumbling and fidgeting, he began with a jerk.

"It's quite true, Queen, what that fellow Brabazon was saying to-day; it's an awful case of spoons with me."

"No, really!" she said, with much apparent sympathy, though finding it very hard to resist her desire to laugh at Villars's flushed, earnest face; it was so strange to see an expression of set purpose on his merry countenance. "Tell me all about it," she went on; "what the girl is like, and if you are going to marry her?"

"She's beautiful, that's one thing I can tell you for certain; as beautiful as you are, Queen, if you don't mind my making the comparison, only she's not a bit like you. She's tall, and has a most lovely figure, and such a handsome face; I can't describe it, but I like it, you know; the only thing I'm sure of about it is that her eyes and hair are dark. Don't think me a fool because I can't describe her better, but the more I feel the less able am I to express my feelings; and so the more lovely she seems to me the

greater bumbles I make in talking of her. However, I'll cut it short, Queen, and you'll understand me just as well. The pith of the whole business is that I'm as spoony as I can be, and unless I can marry that girl I shall be good for nothing for the rest of my life."

"No, don't say that," said Cecil earnestly; "it might be a blow you could never get over, but no woman, or no man, is worth ceasing to do your duty in life for. But I don't yet see that there is any cause for you to despond or fear you won't get her. Do you think her parents would object, or that she cares for any one else?"

"I don't think her parents would dislike the idea, and I certainly saw no signs of a liking on her part for anyone. And it's just that frightens me. I can't fancy she favours me, when she has never fancied any of the other better men than I she has seen."

"Come, Villars," laughed Cecil, "it is too droll to see you humble; you lose your characteristic charm of bumptiousness when you speak that way. If you didn't adopt that style

with her, I should say you had plenty of chance. Tell me, does she know or guess anything of this, or have you told her?"

"I didn't get an opportunity of asking her properly, for I hadn't made up my mind to do it till the morning we were going; then, just as the bugle was sounding, I met her (I hadn't seen her to say good-bye to her with the others) as I was dashing round to the stables to mount. I stopped for one instant to say farewell and, carried away by my feelings, had just time to say she should see me again before long, as I should have a request to make of her, when Brabazon's voice interrupted us, calling out, 'Villars, you idle young dog, the bugle's gone, and we're all waiting,' as he rode out of the yard gateway, and appeared before us. 'I was only saying good-bye to the ladies,' I said, dashing past him into the yard, where I found a servant walking my horse up and down. I sprang on its back, and taking up my position rode away—getting a smile and a wave of her hand, certainly, as I passed, but mentally cursing Brabazon the while for

having been in such a confounded hurry."

"Well," mused Cecil, "no doubt she guessed very clearly what the request was you wished to make of her; but perhaps it is as well Captain Brabazon gave you a little time for consideration. First of all, what will your family say to it?"

"I declare, Queen, you frighten me," answered Villars, "when you assume such a grave and business-like air. I don't, however, think they can object; and if they do, what does it matter? I am my own master, and have an independent fortune. I shouldn't like to quarrel with my mother and Carrie, but if they were to set their faces against my marrying such a girl as Miss James, I should think their conduct most unjustifiable, and should take the matter into my own hands, doing as I wished, and cutting them afterwards."

"That's a bad way to begin life," she replied. "You see, we know something about cutting our relations, or rather, I ought to say, being cut by them, and I am sure, sooner or later, one always finds the inconvenience of such a posi-

tion, having no kindred to fall back upon when assistance is needed; for though I do think the friends one makes are often more to be trusted than one's real relatives, yet one can never feel entitled to count on their help, as one might on that of kindred. My father, I am sure, often regrets now he has no one to whom he can look as a guardian for me, if anything should happen to him, except dear Colonel Meredith, who is, after all, unconnected with us in any way."

"You may be right, Queen," he replied; "but for all that, you couldn't have a man give up the girl he chooses for his wife because her fortune or her family don't please his relatives. It isn't they who marry her, it is he; and it strikes me he is therefore the person whose happiness should most be considered in the matter. After all, it is only once in his life a man generally meets with a girl who really suits him, and he can't be expected to give up his chance for the sake of a set of humdrum people who are not in the bargain at all."

This the young fellow pronounced with the

ing obtained it readily, the Colonel being only too pleased to get rid of him, he started next day on his expedition.

After his return, he told Cecil that he had driven out on a jarvie till within about two miles of Woodville; and then, telling the driver to wait for him, as, in case of a refusal he thought it prudent to secure the means of retreat, he set out towards the house. It was latish that Autumn evening as he reached the avenue, and under the shade of the overhanging boughs it was nearly quite dark. Just as he was nearing more open ground, however, he heard behind him a quick sharp trot he knew well. He waited, as the rider approached in the darkness; the horse's pace slackened till it fell into a walk. This gave him the opportunity he desired. Stepping forward, and raising his hat at the same time, he laid his hand on her rein. She started, but did not otherwise appear terrified, as he spoke and hoped he had not frightened her.

"No," she answered, laughing; "for one minute I was alarmed when I saw a dark

figure approaching, but the moment you raised your hat I knew it was a gentleman."

By this time they had emerged into an open space, where the trees receded from the road; and the girl, looking down, recognised her companion.

"Why? it is you, Mr. Villars!" she exclaimed. "I didn't know who it was, and certainly never dreamed you were back here again. When did you come?"

"Just now," he answered. "Listen to me for a few minutes; I have something to say, and on your reply will depend my going or staying. A soldier's wooing is short, Emily, and I won't keep you long. Tell me, will you be my wife?"

With a simple graceful action, the girl put out her hand to him as he walked beside her, and answered softly,

"If I can make you happy I will."

"Happy! how can you doubt it?" answered the young man with rapture. "You wrong yourself greatly if you question your power, and you underrate your influence over me if you

don't believe that it was to see you, and set my mind at rest, by getting an answer to this petition, that I came back all the way from Athlone."

What passed between them it is unnecessary to repeat ; it is sufficient to say the poor carman, after waiting an unconscionable time by the roadside for his missing fare, received a message to the effect that he was no longer needed ; and Villars spent the remainder of his leave—which, after all, was only for ten days—at Woodville.

Of course, though Villars was most anxious to have the wedding on the spot, without any delay for trousseau or presents, the bride's family had too truly feminine an idea of the importance of such things, to consent for a moment to their being waived in this instance. To be sure, in such a remote country-place the wedding could not be large, nor the breakfast very numerously attended ; still everything must be there—bridesmaids, groomsmen, bouquets, dresses, toasts, and speeches, all correct, a marriage without these adjuncts being none at all in the eyes of the simple country neighbours.

Therefore Villars was obliged to return when his leave was over, and wait till all the necessary paraphernalia had been accumulated, and all the usual formalities had been observed; one thing at least being remarked by several of his brother-officers during this probationary period, that the Colonel had never been so polite to the young fellow before, and even presented a very handsome gold bracelet to the bride, as a token of the esteem in which he held his young subordinate.

"There seems to be a premium on marriage in this regiment," remarked Brabazon, on hearing this. "I think we'd better all begin to look for some one who'd take us. Do you think, Ainslie, he'd give you or me a bracelet like that for the lady of our choice?"

"Not unless you'd made as hard running with the Queen as Villars had; it was relief at finding such a formidable opponent withdrawn that prompted that piece of generosity."

"You're right, I think; and I know this, I'd go in for the Queen in a minute if I thought she'd have me; but that's no go, I fear, so I'll

wait till I see some one closely resembling her, before I slip the matrimonial noose around my neck."

"I second that resolution, old fellow, and it strikes me we will have to wait some time in consequence. Tell me, are you going down to the wedding? I am."

"So am I too; I should like to see poor old Villars turned off, and though it is rather a melancholy occasion, still, if any of the bridesmaids are pretty, we may contrive to amuse ourselves. I'm to be best man," added Brabazon.

And so he was, and supported the dignity of his friend, himself, and the regiment very well when the trying hour arrived; whispering at the church door, where Villars began to exhibit signs of confusion,

"Cheer up, old boy, few men are called to go through this trial more than once in their lifetime."

"It isn't that," gasped Villars, gazing round him with a terrified air; "but I do believe I've forgotten the license and ring! I left them on

my dressing-room table, I can swear I did!" as he spoke drawing out of his pockets, handkerchief, gloves, everything, and tossing them on the ground.

"Swear not at all, man, and don't make such a mess," replied Brabazon, catching his arm. "Confess now! Am I not a treasure of a best man; it struck me you'd do something of the kind, so I took a look round your room before I left, and seeing the necessaries lying there, I knew what would happen, and brought them on spec. The bride, I know, would thank me for that."

"Oh! Brabazon, what a brick you are!" said Villars, stuffing everything into his pocket pell-mell again. "I hope I shan't do anything foolish, but I feel quite in a fluster after that."

"He doesn't consider that was foolish at all, you remark," Ainslie whispered; "but now let's get on, I'm sure it's time we should be moving."

The ceremony passed off without further mishap, the bride, according to the account given afterwards by the gentlemen present, behaving with great propriety, and looking charming. At

the breakfast Brabazon distinguished himself by returning thanks for the bridesmaids in choice and appropriate language; declaring that until that day he had never fully realised the miseries of a single life, but on beholding the bevy of beauties before him charging down the aisle, his heart had been taken by storm, and only for the difficulty he experienced in choosing between them, he would have been tied up then and there, as securely as his friend Villars.

However, in spite of speeches, and jokes, and merriment, the breakfast was over at last, and the happy pair started, with the appropriate volley of old shoes flying after them. Then the company dispersing, Woodville once more resumed its ordinary quietude.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RETURN.

A FEW weeks rolled away slowly and very monotonously for Cecil. Most of the officers were on leave, and of those that were with the regiment, only Paget was an old friend. He, too, poor fellow, was getting too deeply into the mire to be a very amusing companion ; for when a man falls very passionately in love, without the object of his devotion being aware of it, he rarely interests her, or enlists her feelings on his behalf. His manner is variable and irritable, from the wish to please and yet the desire to keep what he feels concealed, which she not understanding finds unpleasant, and dreads the poor victim accordingly.

Thus Cecil thought Major Paget greatly altered, and not nearly as charming a companion as formerly; indeed he was really unreasonable, always wanting her to do things she couldn't do for him, and perpetually accusing her of favouring the Colonel.

Which accusation was certainly unfounded, as the more she perceived her father's liking for him, and the more constant he was in his attendance at their house, the more surely did her heart warn her that all her troubles with that man were not over, and that she should be in difficulties about him again before long.

She had been asked to the wedding, and had declined on the plea of her father's delicate health, which made her unwilling to leave him even for a day; but for all that she had a very natural curiosity to see the wife of the man who had once loved her, and had told her so in a romantic, boyish fashion.

The day of their return arrived at last, and Cecil, full of anxiety to see what the bride was like, ran to the window every time she heard the sound of wheels passing, in hopes it might

be the return of the expected pair. She was doomed to disappointment, however, for day wore into evening without their arrival, when at eight o'clock, just as she was making her father's after-dinner cup of tea, the door opened, and Villars appeared in the room with a lady beside him. Cecil, who was on her knees before the fire, toasting some bread for her father, rose at the sound of the opening door, and, without turning her head, laid the bread on a plate, saying, as she did so,

"Here, Perch, take this, and toast it downstairs." She held out the plate as she spoke, still without looking round towards Villars, who had been advancing towards her. And as she did so, she pressed her hands on her cheeks, which were flushed and burnt from stooping over the fire.

"Very well, miss. Is there anything else I can do?" asked Villars, taking the toast, and trying to speak as much as possible in the tone of the true Perch.

"Yes, I think you'd better put the tea-pot down by the fire; papa won't be awake for a

little time," she answered, looking round for her work, which she had laid down somewhere. Instantly Mrs. Villars' petticoats caught her eye; she turned, looked at the supposed Perch, and then uttered a delighted cry as she perceived who he was. "You dear good fellow!" she cried, "to come and see me as soon as you return. This is Mrs. Villars, I know—welcome to the regiment. Now do take off your things, and sit down to warm yourself; I'm sure it's cold out. How did you come in without my hearing you, and how did you like your quarters?"

"They're so comfortable," answered the bride, speaking for the first time; "thanks to you, I'm told. The servant said you had seen to everything, and got it all so nice. I had not expected much comfort, having been told I must rough it a great deal at first."

Here she looked at her husband with a smile, which told very plainly to whom she was indebted for that idea.

"I don't know what Villars calls roughing," laughed Cecil. "I only know, ever since I have

met him, I have never seen him do anything in that line. He has always been most careful of himself, I think. And now let's have some tea; I'll wake papa, as he has slept long enough."

Leveston was called up in spite of their remonstrances, and Villars, taking the place of the invaluable Perch, whom he had before tried to personify, finished the toast; the two girls fraternizing very speedily over the tea-table.

Cecil didn't wonder at Villars having called his wife beautiful, while she was yet Miss Emily James. She certainly was strikingly handsome, with a very fine figure, and particularly good features. She had evidently heard a good deal about the Queen of the Regiment, as Cecil could tell from some little things she let fall, but seemed inclined to be friendly, notwithstanding the advantages the girl might have over her. It was rather late when she and her husband took their departure; and no sooner were they gone than Cecil, turning to her father, asked,

"What do you think of her?"

"She seems very attractive, puss," he answered; "and he looks particularly happy. I think them well-matched; and I'm very glad to see Villars so nicely settled, as he was a good young fellow always, though rather wild."

Leveston did not express the real cause of his satisfaction, which was that, now this formidable opponent was removed, the Colonel's suit would progress more favourably.

A very friendly feeling soon sprang up between the new-comer and Cecil; they were nearly the same age, and consequently enjoyed each other's society, going out for walks together, or initiating each other into the mysteries of various kinds of fancy work, as the days got colder and less inviting for out-of-door exercise. It was just as well for Cecil she had this companion, as the Colonel's visits became more frequent and prolonged, and her father's constant praises of him more irksome, pointing as they did towards one particular end, which she dreaded as the greatest evil that could possibly befall her.

"That poor fellow is very much to be pitied,"

Leveston remarked one day to his daughter, just after Houston had left the room; "cannot I prevail on you to look a little more favourably on him?"

"Don't you think I am more to be pitied?" she asked, passionately. "Pressed by a father whom I love, to marry a man I detest; harassed by his constant society and presence. I cannot do it, papa dear; I may be driven mad by his persistence—I sometimes fear I shall be—but take him willingly, I can never."

"And what, my child, will you do when I am gone?—for I know now that my life will not be a long one. Don't you know that it is my love for you, and my anxiety to provide you a home, that makes me urge this step on you."

"I feel sure you mean what is right," she answered; "but do you think it would be fair to Colonel Houston that I should marry him with the sole aim and object of providing myself with a comfortable home, when I not only do not love him, but cannot conquer my instinctive dislike to him. No, dear, your weakness makes you take a gloomy view of

things ; but I hope it may be many a long day yet before I shall want any protection but yours !”

“ Think of it, Cecil—don’t decide on the matter too hurriedly : to please me, try and consider it, and if you can bring yourself to do as I wish, you will make me happier than I had ever hoped to be again.”

Poor Cecil ! she saw her father was low and full of gloomy forebodings, and she would so much have liked to please him by doing as he wished, if it had been possible ; only that which he wanted was so impossible, she could not even think of it. What should she do ? If she had only some friend she could confide in, and with whom she could talk it over.

Stay ! Mrs. Villars was the very person, and though of course she would repeat all Cecil said to her husband, after the fashion of young wives, yet, to be sure, he had a pretty good idea of what was going on already, and what she had to say was nothing to be ashamed of. It was rather late one gloomy Winter’s day when this idea came into her head. Villars, she knew,

was out, so telling her father where she was going, she put on her coat and hat, and hurried off to her friend's quarters.

Mrs. Villars was snugly seated on a low stool by the fire, her habit on, and her hat lying on the floor beside her, she having just come in from a ride; and finding letters awaiting her arrival, she had sat down to read them before changing her dress. She threw letters and all away as Cecil entered, and greeted her warmly.

"Come and sit by the fire," she cried. "I am nearly frozen, though I have been riding. It is very cold out; Hedworth is away, and I am dull and stupid, so come and cheer me up a little, like a good girl."

"I want to have a chat with you, certainly," Cecil answered; "but whether you'll be brightened up by what I have to say, I can't tell. At any rate, though not a cheerful subject, to me it's an important one."

"Then I guess it," cried Emily Villars gaily. "The Colonel has proposed, and you don't know whether to take him or not."

"No, indeed," she replied. "He did that

long ago, and I gave him his answer. But how did you guess it?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, Hedworth had been saying the Colonel was awfully spoony, as he calls it, about you, and he seemed to think the man was so determined, in the end you would be worried into taking him."

"I gave Villars credit for knowing me better," cried Cecil indignantly. "He must be aware that nothing would induce me to have that man. But my father, who, poor fellow! is still ailing after his accident, is very low, and takes most gloomy views into his head. I don't think he's worse, indeed he looks to me pretty well, but he fidgets and worries himself with the idea that I have no one to take care of me, if anything was to happen to him; and he's always trying to persuade me to think better of the Colonel. I can't do that; he's distasteful to me in every way; and I came to you to-day to tell me what you think. Am I not right in refusing to marry this man, even at my father's earnest desire, when I feel towards him as I do?"

"If there is no chance of your liking him bet-

ter in time to come, you are right," answered the young wife, thinking she could not marry a man she did not care about. "Tell me," she went on coaxingly, "is there no one else in the case? For any girl who is perfectly heart-whole may in time learn to love even a man she once disliked, if he is patient and persevering."

Cecil blushed deeply as she replied, "I don't see why I should be ashamed to tell it you. There is a reason why this man can never be more to me than he is at present, and also why I feel so very strongly against him as I do. You may have heard Villars speak of a Captain Anstruther of this regiment, who was cashiered a short time ago?"

"I have," Mrs. Villars answered. "Hedworth told me all about it. He didn't believe the truth of the charge."

"I should think not," cried Cecil. "I believe the Colonel got up the story expressly to put Gerald Anstruther out of the regiment; therefore you cannot wonder that, even to please my father, I find it impossible to be friendly with such a man."

"I don't wonder at your aversion to Colonel Houston, if such is your opinion of him," answered her friend; "but I think you wrong him. Disagreeable as his face is in many ways, there is a certain honesty about it, that forbids such a suspicion. But if you came to me for advice, though I fancy your mind was made up, no matter what course I urged, I should say to you, hold by your love through evil report and good report, as long as you feel you truly care for him. No worldly position or advantages, no paternal blessing, would soothe your conscience, or give you peace with yourself, if you knew you had betrayed the man who trusted you. Perhaps I am a bad counsellor, for I have no troubles of the kind," she continued, smiling; "but I feel that, in a case like this, to follow the dictates of your heart must be the right course."

"You have given me courage," Cecil said, rising. "I was so afraid I was selfish, in thus preferring my own happiness to my father's; but it isn't for myself alone I am striving—the battle would be short then, I feel."

"Child, remember this," answered her friend, looking down on her gravely from her superior height; "only lifelong misery can result from marrying one for whom you have neither love nor respect. No father has a right to demand such a sacrifice from his child—no child has a right to yield it."

"I will not forget our conversation, it will keep me up and comfort me often, I have no doubt," the girl replied, saying good-bye as she spoke, and running back to her father's house with a lighter heart than she had had for some time.

During all this time no letter had reached her from Anstruther. Mail after mail went by, and still no news of him arrived. She began to wonder what had happened, if he had gone up the country to some place from which posts didn't run, but she never for a moment doubted his loyalty. Then her letters, had they reached him? If they had not, she feared he might fall back into his old mistrust of her, and she had no way, when so far separated, to prove her truth.

"I'll hope for the best," she would try to say, courageously, when these doleful ideas came into her mind; "but it is a long, long time to wait—three years; and then, who knows, he may never return—I may never see him again."

This doubting, and fearing, and fretting was a trial certainly to the poor little Queen, and it moved even Houston's heart to see how white and transparent she had become, and what a wistful expression there was in her shadowy eyes; but when he noticed it he would sigh impatiently, and think, "She is grieving still for that villain; it's a good thing for her he's gone, though I wish she didn't fret so much about him."

There was more trouble in store for her, however, when day by day Leveston got worse and wasted away before her. Then she began to fear sometimes that it might be as he said, that he was going to leave her; and a cold, cruel fear would grasp her heart, as she thought what she should do, left all alone in the wide world. He faded slowly, sometimes a little

better, when her hopes would revive, and she would be almost merry again; but these rallies were always followed by relapses, getting worse and more prolonged each time, till at last all hope left her, and she began to see clearly she should never have her father as he had once been again: nay more, that it was only for a very short time longer she should have him at all.

Then a passionate rebellion to the will of God sprang up in her heart. She was no worse than others, that she should be visited in this way. She was so young, she thought, with plaintive self-pity, and already all the brightness, the joy, the hope had passed out of her life. A grey dark future spread before her, for even the one bright point to which she had looked forward was hidden now from her sight, and she had no heart to seek it.

Houston's attentions and kindness to her father she watched with a sullen, silent apathy. This man of whom she thought so badly was tender as a woman with the invalid, who had conceived a strong liking for his formerly dis-

trusted and disliked Colonel. Indeed it was no wonder the dying man loved him, and looked so eagerly for his return whenever he had been absent for a short time. Every little helpful act that the most devoted friendship could prompt did the Colonel think of; there was not a wish expressed, or even unexpressed, that was not fulfilled, and with a delicacy for which Cecil had not given him credit. He even avoided intruding himself upon her, visiting her father most at times when he knew she would be absent.

Everyone believed, of course, that, much as he might like the invalid, there was an end and aim in this devotion; and all Cecil's old friends stood aside, as it were, looking at the life-story being played out before their eyes, with a keen interest in its termination, but yet no doubt whatever as to what the end would be.

"Poor little Queen! it's all up with her," said Ainslie, as he sat on the arm of a chair in Brabazon's room, smoking; "she'll marry the Colonel as sure as a gun, though I don't believe she cares about him either."

"And so no doubt she will ; indeed I don't see how she can save herself from doing it," commented Villars afterwards, recounting the speech to his wife.

If she had only known it, the whole regiment looked upon the affair as settled ; whilst the Colonel himself, though half afraid of her self-reliant determined nature baffling him at the last, felt her escape was almost impossible, and was easier and happier accordingly. One day, as Cecil sat by the sofa on which her father was lying (he hardly ever sat up now), he began—

"Have you thought of what I said to you last time we talked about my illness, and when I told you I should not long be left with you ?"

"Papa, papa, don't talk to me about it," she cried. "I fear you are right now, but I cannot bear you to speak about it. Let me blind myself as long as I can."

"It isn't that, child, I wish to talk about," he answered, sadly ; "that must come some time—a little sooner or a little later is the only difference, and we must all learn to meet it if we would be happy. But about you, my child,

that is what troubles me. Don't you see how this man cares for you, and, in spite of your aversion, treats me with such tenderness, for your sake? Can't you feel that it is all on your account?—and don't you know that if he is willing to serve for you so long and so patiently, his love must indeed be one on which you can rely, and that will not fail you in time of need, as a less tried affection might have done.”

“Father,” she said, dropping on her knees beside his sofa, suddenly, “listen to me. Do you remember my telling you, one day last Summer (how long ago it seems now!) that I loved Gerald Anstruther, who was cashiered through this Colonel Houston's means, and on his accusation? Do you remember my telling you he would return for me in three years' time to marry me? What I said then, I say now; none other than that man have I ever loved; none other than that man will I ever marry; and you would have me take the enemy who ruined him! Forgive me, father, if I pain you by this refusal; any other request you make I

will obey, even to giving up the man I love, but I can never be Colonel Houston's wife."

Leveston sighed faintly as he answered,

"Infatuated child, how can a man convicted of such a crime be any longer worthy in your eyes?"

"Convicted, but not guilty," she replied, proudly. "Oh! father, don't you see how much dearer his noble patience, his unjust sufferings, have made him to me, than if he had led a gay, prosperous life, and been admired and courted by the world? Then his position might have pleased me, now his trials and fortitude ennoble him in my eyes. Believe me, dear, in this—he never committed the crime of which he was accused, and I am not alone in thinking thus. Villars and Paget both agree with me."

"Where is he now?" asked Leveston, after a pause, during which he made no comment on his daughter's last assertion.

"In Queensland, somewhere," she answered; "he was to have written to me, but I have heard nothing of him since he left this country."

"He will never come back thence, I warn you," said Leveston ; " he will marry out there some gay colonial lady, whilst you are wasting your youth waiting for him. Be wise in time, darling ; do as your father implores you on his dying bed. God will reward your obedience."

Perhaps, for a minute, a remembrance of her old childish reluctance to learn that command flashed through her mind as he spoke ; but her heart was too heavy for the recollection even to provoke a smile, and she answered, sadly,

"Don't make my trial harder for me to bear than it is already. He will be true, I know ; whether he will ever come back to me, is another question. It seems to me all the rest of the world is happy except me, and those about me. Our good days are past, I suppose. If I had known how quickly they would have fled, how much more I should have valued them ! Wouldn't you like them back again, papa, dear ?—those happy days in India, when you were well and strong ?"

"I am tired," he replied, "and would rest gladly, if only you were happy. I couldn't live

my life over again, it has been too weary. If I could wish at all now about anything, it would be that I might lie with your mother under the banian tree in the Indian grave-yard. But that is not possible, and I have no other desire save for you."

But she couldn't promise what he wanted. It seemed to her, thinking Colonel Houston guilty, as she did, of having got up the charge upon which Anstruther was condemned, that the vengeance of Heaven would fall on her if she perjured herself before God, by vowing to love and honour one whom she believed criminal, and hated in proportion as she loved the man he had injured.

CHAPTER V.

THE CRIMINAL DISCOVERED.

IT was rather early next day when Houston called, and something strange in his manner struck Cecil at once; he seemed excited, as though he had something to say, and yet he appeared to have extreme difficulty in bringing it out, whatever it might be.

He moved about uneasily, took up his hat and laid it down again, asked Leveston repeatedly how he felt, and when answered, didn't appear to hear what was said.

Cecil, remarking this, after a few minutes rose to leave the room, imagining he had a private communication to make to her father; but he, seeing her intention, stopped her, saying,

"Don't go, Miss Leveston. I've got some-

thing to say I want you to hear. The fact is," he continued, looking down and getting very red in the face, "I was wrong about Anstruther, and he never doctored the horse at all."

"I knew it," Cecil answered simply; whilst her father asked,

"What do you mean, Houston? The evidence was conclusive, not to mention his confusion."

"We were all wrong, nevertheless," he replied, "and the Queen was right. I can't tell you," he went on hurriedly, "how cut up I've been to think we've broken an innocent man. I found it out late yesterday evening, and I've not been able to get it out of my head ever since. The worst of it is, I don't see how to repair the mischief."

"I don't think he'd take reparation from your hands," answered Cecil proudly. "You allowed yourself to be so blinded by hate and prejudice as not to see how utterly impossible it was he should commit such a low mean crime."

"He would be very wrong if he allowed resentment to stand in the way of any amends I

could make him ; but I fear there is nothing to be done, except to proclaim his innocence as widely as his supposed guilt has been made known."

Cecil looked at him for a minute or two earnestly ; but his eyes were bent down, and he did not perceive that she was watching him. His face was still flushed, and there was a dejected, troubled expression on his countenance that convinced Cecil it had cost him no slight struggle to come forward so bravely and confess his error. Her father said nothing, but wondered silently how the man had been able thus to deal a death-blow to all his hopes.

Suddenly the young girl, rising and advancing with swift, noiseless motion to Colonel Houston, who never raised his eyes as she approached, held out her hand, saying,

"I honour you more, Colonel, for what you have done to-day than I ever did before. Let us be friends. I will confess now that I always imagined you had got up the charge, and suborned those witnesses, in order to put the man you disliked out of the regiment. I see I was

mistaken, and beg your pardon heartily for the wrong I did you by such a suspicion."

"Is it possible you really thought so badly of me?" he began, taking her proffered hand; "then perhaps"—he stopped suddenly, for something in the expression of her face, and her sudden withdrawal, warned him he was about to tread on dangerous ground.

"But how did you find out your mistake?" asked Leveston at length; "you have not told us a word about that, and I am anxious to know."

"Well, I must go back a good way to make it plain," answered the Colonel. "But first of all, let me ask you if you remember my groom; I don't mean my soldier servant, but the other fellow I kept. I had a fancy for him, he was such a splendid rider. I saw him one day in Mexico, mounted on a young colt that had gained itself a great name from its untameable character and beauty. He succeeded in subduing it completely, though it had got the better of everyone who had mounted it before. Being fond of horses, and generally keeping a good

many, I took it into my head that this fellow would be just the kind of man I should like to have about the stables. He seemed to understand animals very well, and, notwithstanding a certain ignorance of our methods of doing many things, to be a handy, clever man.

“He entered my service very willingly, and came over to England with me, fulfilling my expectations in every way as regarded the care and training of the horses put under his charge, but a precious scamp in other respects.

“Not very long before those races, I caught him in a ruffianly act, which provoked me very much; and having a riding-whip in my hand, I, without at all considering what I was doing, gave him a pretty good hiding with it, until it smashed in pieces; and then, throwing him the wages due to him, I told him to be off, and not let me see him near the place again. After it was over, I began to think I ran a very fair chance of feeling a dagger in my back some day, as a Mexican never forgives a blow; but it would not have entered into my head to attribute anything else to him. A few days after

I had turned him away, I received a letter from a gentleman in this part of the world, Mr. Mayleigh, who keeps hounds near here, asking whether I could recommend the man as head-groom, he being in want of one, and the fellow having come to him for employment. I wrote to say I considered him a good and careful hand over horses, but an unmitigated ruffian in other respects. To this letter I got no answer, and until yesterday never knew whether Mr. Mayleigh had taken him into his service or not, though I once or twice thought I saw a man resembling José riding through the streets since I have been here."

"And is it this man who did it?" asked Cecil eagerly. "How did you find it out?"

"In this way," Houston answered. "I was out riding yesterday, and not far from Mr. Mayleigh's place I saw before me, on the road, a man mounted on a magnificent young horse, that, to judge by its evident fright and fury, had never been ridden before. Now that is all very well on an American prairie, where you can force an animal to gallop at full speed, straight

on until it is ready to drop from exhaustion; but here, on narrow, crooked, hard roads, it is nothing short of madness, and as it struck me none but my foolhardy friend José would do such a thing, I kept some way behind him, watching the struggle with great interest, and ready, if he succeeded in conquering the animal, to call him a fine fellow, in spite of his rascally character. He got on very well for a time, having, as I found afterwards, not only a formidable bit in the animal's mouth, but also a running noose of rope round its neck, just at the windpipe; so that whenever the brute tried to bolt, or became more than he could manage with the bridle he quietly choked it into submission with the lasso. The road was not a very wide one, there being just enough room for two carts to pass each other easily. Presently he came to a place where some proprietor, who owned land on both sides of the road, was building walls, to fence in his property. The walls were of solid masonry, and nearly finished, waiting only for coping stones to complete them. These stones, and numbers of others,

left over after the completion of the walls, lay all along inside them, as, of course, was the best place for them.

“Just as the man I was watching got between these walls, a cart came along, well loaded with turf. The young horse had evidently never met anything of the kind before, and the sight increased tenfold the terror that was already maddening him. Swerving from the cart, he gave a short bucking spring in the direction of the wall, and, as I think, the man José, seeing his head turned that way, and being quite unable to force an unmouthed animal round, in so enclosed a space, backed towards the cart, drove the spurs into him, and let him go at the wall. Be that as it may, I saw the horse gather himself together and rise at the leap, which, besides being a very solid wall, as I have said, was at least five feet high. As might have been expected, the fright and bewilderment of the animal were so great, and he was so totally ignorant of the nature of the work required of him, that he didn’t get his forelegs clear over; and being unable

to put them under him in time, turned quite over, falling on top of his rider, amongst the coping-stones and rubbish on the other side.

"It was a fearful-looking fall, and I rode up at once, to see if anything serious had happened. Before I could come to the spot, the horse had struggled to his feet, and made off, leaving the man lying in a pool of blood, to all appearance dead. I sent the turf-cart man for water and assistance, whilst I tied my nag by the roadside, and climbed over the wall to the injured man. He was frightfully wounded, but had his senses about him, and recognized me immediately; for it was José, as I had fancied.

"‘I am done for, Señor,’" he gasped, after a minute or two's silence. 'I feel that brute has killed me; though it was my own fault, too,' he added, his characteristic liking for horses compelling him to speak the truth; 'he did the best he knew, and wasn't to blame for the accident, as I hope you'll tell the master, if I'm dead before I see him.'

"Then he went on, with frequent interrup-

tious from pain and faintness, to tell me that it was he who had drugged my horse the night of the races.

“‘Do you remember the time you gave me a beating, sir?’ he asked.

“I said I did ; and he then went on to tell me how he had sworn to be revenged on me, but fearing to use the dagger in a country where the laws against such offences were so stringent, he had hit on the other expedient as likely to annoy me more, and also be lucrative to him ; for he told me he made no end of money betting against me.

“I then asked him how he got into the stable ; and it came out, after a little hesitation, that late in the evening he had contrived to fall in with Marks, shortly before tattoo, and persuaded him to take a glass or two of some very fine rum with him. Of course, as the rum was very strongly drugged, Marks had not swallowed it many minutes before he was in a state of stupor, and José in possession of the key of the stables.

“This was long after Anstruther had been

down, and there was no one loitering about. He slipped in, closed the door behind him, and was about to creep on to Blue Lightning's stall, when he trod on something, the feel of which he did not recognize. He stooped and picked it up; it was a gentleman's glove; and, though not knowing to whom it belonged, he fancied it might serve to divert suspicion from himself, if left in the horse's stall. We know he acted on this design, and, the animal being dosed, he quietly slipped back to where he had left Marks, without being noticed, and without exciting any suspicion. The key was replaced in the man's pocket, and leaving him near the door of his hut, where his comrades, entering, could not fail to observe him, he stole away.

"It was very cleverly managed; for some good-natured comrades finding him, he was reported as sick, and when the investigation began it was known by many that he had been ill in bed all the evening—or, at least, almost from the time he left his comrades, after Anstruther's returning from the stables. Thus, if I had ever been inclined to suspect him, which I

was not, his *alibi* was very clearly proved, and his innocence would have been easily established."

"And this is the way poor Gerald was hunted down!" Cecil murmured in a low tone, but not so low as to escape altogether the hearing of Houston, who felt, to repair the wrong he had committed, he had indeed been obliged to destroy his own hopes, and who would gladly have left, now that he had done what he considered his duty; but Leveston called him back.

"What about the man José?" he asked. "Is he dead?"

"No, not yet; the doctor says he has a wonderful constitution, and it is just possible he may get over it. If he does, I hope his illness will have made him a better man, though I must say he seemed rather proud than sorry when he made his confession to me. Indeed I think what prompted him to do it was a fear that, if he died without telling, I might never know it was his vengeance. I must be off now. I wish I knew where Anstruther was, that I might write and tell him his innocence was proved."

"The only address we know of," said Cecil quickly, before her father could answer, "is Brisbane, Queensland. Direct to the post-office there; but it is very doubtful if he will ever get it."

He turned and went, trying, as long as he was before the eyes of the world, to keep up a bold front; but when he reached his quarters, he sat down by the table, resting his head on his crossed arms, and feeling as if this misery that he endured was greater than he could bear.

"She writes to him," he muttered through his clenched teeth. "Why did I discover his innocence? He will return and marry her; and I—I am nothing to her—worse than nothing, indeed, for she hates me as the man who ruined him. Now I have destroyed myself," he moaned, "by telling her this; and yet what else could I do? Could I have kept it secret, and let all men believe him guilty? No, that would be too base; even for her, bad as I am, and much as I hate the fellow, so that I would we could meet in fair fight, and try which is the better man—that would have been too black a deed

for me. '*Tout est perdu hormis l'honneur,*' was what the old French King wrote home after his defeat," he added, raising his head and smiling a ghastly smile; "and I think truly I might say the same. Everything fails me, but the poor heritage of a barren honour I was taught to cleave to in my childhood. Oh! little Queen, little Queen," he went on passionately, "evil was the day and dark the hour for me when I met you; for you have stolen my strength from me, as Dalilah charmed Samson's might from him. I cannot leave you, though I know I should be better and happier far could I forget you; I cannot win you, I cannot hate you, I can do nothing but love on like a maudlin fool, drinking in the light of your sweet eyes when they rest on me; listening to your gentle voice; living on the few kind words you throw so carelessly to me now and then, as you would throw a crust to your dog. And this man I have wronged, how much happier he is in spite of all—curse him! For he knows he has your heart, my Queen, and that you are loyal to the death, whilst he is toiling to win

you in foreign lands. Be a man, Houston !” he added, rising with sudden energy, and passing his hand across his face, as if to wipe away the torturing thoughts that oppressed him. “ You have had yourself to decide your fate this day ; be brave, and make another struggle ; learn to gain the mastery over your own heart, and forget her ; leave her for a while, and come back a new man.”

He called his servant with a sudden determination, and ordered him to pack up his things. He telegraphed for leave, and whilst waiting for an answer, wrote a few short lines to Anstruther, telling him of the discovery he had made, and expressing sorrow for having misjudged him. It did indeed cost him an effort to write thus to the man he hated, and own himself in the wrong ; but he was brave enough in those things, and followed the dictates of honour without flinching. He saw no one else that day, and left next morning early, with the full determination that he would not return until he had torn this fatal love from his heart.

In the meantime, when the Colonel left them, Cecil and her father remained for a time looking at each other, both overcome by their own feelings, and too much pre-occupied to speak. At last Leveston murmured in a broken voice,

“My child, you were right, and I have behaved badly to my old friend. What could have possessed me to believe him guilty? But, indeed, he looked like it, his confusion was so apparent.”

“But he explained that,” she interrupted. “Surely it was natural that, seeing himself accused of such a crime before such an enemy, his heart should have failed him with foreboding terror. He was himself soon, when the first shock of seeing what his fate would be was past, and then he took his course at once boldly and bravely; and I doubt not, if he still lives, toils as busily with his hands, and performs his present work in life as well as though he had never had anything else to do.”

“No doubt he does,” her father answered, “for he was a brave fellow. But he is thousands of miles away; and even if he hears his

innocence is proved, it may be years before we see him again. In the meantime, I shall have died, and he will never know how it has grieved my last hours to think I judged him harshly, and deserted him in his need. Tell him, my child, if you see him again—though I fear that will never be; I have it on my mind that he will not hear the news of his acquittal from suspicion—but if he does return, let him know that I, who will then be dead, ask his pardon for having believed the cruel charge brought against him.”

He lay back exhausted, while Cecil wept quietly beside him. That her father was dying day by day was only too clear, and it seemed to her his words had a prophetic sound, coming as they did from one on the brink of the grave. What if he too was gone, and her father's forebodings should be fulfilled, that she should never see him again! It was very possible, something whispered probable, or why had her letters passed entirely unnoticed?

How closely joy and sorrow dog each other's footsteps in this life! An hour ago, and the

news had seemed the gladdest she had heard for many a long day ; but now her happiness was turned to grief with the thought that he whom it most concerned, and whose spirit would so have bounded with rapture and pride at hearing it, might perhaps be lying cold and still, where neither joy nor pleasure, grief nor pain, shall ever cause the wildest heart one passing throb.

As for her father, he remembered bitterly the dark agonised face turned in piteous appeal to his accusers, as he asked, almost in vain, for some to believe his word. He could realize now how it must have wrung that haughty spirit to plead for that which had formerly been to him as the air he breathed, and as little thought of, also—namely, the trust and confidence of those about him. He could not help asking himself how would he have borne such a trial ; and a kind of groan escaped him as he thought what might have been his position had only suspicion chanced to fall on him.

For, being ill, he felt, more strongly than perhaps he would have willingly acknowledged,

the weakness of his character, which had fought his battle in the world very indifferently, even when surrounded by affection and trust, and which would have succumbed altogether, had any such overwhelming trial fallen to his lot.

Then he thought of Houston's act that day. If he had been in the wrong, and had hunted a man almost to the death on false premises, would he have had the courage to come forth boldly and acknowledge his mistake the instant he discovered it—even thereby ruining his hopes, when he seemed about to reach their fulfilment? He almost thought not, though he knew it was right, and could see the grandeur of the act, but he was so weak, so miserably weak, what another man would do at any cost, because it was his duty, and the right thing to do, he would avoid, or at least try to shirk, he knew; and he could not but fear he would at least have put off confessing his error for a little longer, had he been the Colonel.

He wished Houston had waited until everything was settled, as it must have been soon, and until he had passed away from this trou-

blesome world. The man was noble and worthy indeed who could act as the Colonel had done; and with none would he sooner leave his child, though his manner might not be as loveable, nor his face as prepossessing, as those of some others.

Regrets were useless, and yet he couldn't help feeling regret; first for the false judgment that had caused all this pain, then for the too early discovery of its falseness, that destroyed the hopes he had cherished. Poor man! he was weaker than ever now, and sorrowed more for the trouble it caused him, and the derangement of his plans, than for the gallant life blighted by the hasty suspicions of himself and his fellows.

Presently, whilst they each sat buried in sad thoughts, Villars came in.

"What is this rumour that's going about?" he said. "They say Anstruther's innocence has been proved—as, indeed, I always knew it would be; but they say, also, it was the Colonel discovered the real culprit, and confessed the wrong done to Anstruther, which I can hardly

believe. He's too proud to own himself in the wrong."

"You don't do him justice, indeed you don't!" cried Cecil earnestly. "It is quite true, as is said—the Colonel found it out and proclaimed it. He came here just a short time ago to tell us, and seemed most anxious it should be known everywhere. He was greatly distressed to think he had been the means of breaking a man on a false charge."

"I hear he is going on leave," replied Villars. "I daresay he wishes to get all the talk about it over before he shows again. One of the first he told was the man Marks, who, it seems, was drinking with the fellow that did it, and who, knowing that something had been put into his drink, was in an awful funk whilst the trial was going on, for fear his misdemeanour should be discovered. He knew he had nothing to do with the doctoring of the horse, but he was aware, also, he had not been in a fit state to watch over his master's interests that night, and that if this came to light he should get into trouble. I noticed that his

manner was confused and frightened that evening," went on Villars; "but it passed off quickly, and I thought no more about it, when I found his comrade's account tallied so exactly with his. I'm sorry now I didn't point out his embarrassment, and have him questioned; the matter might have been cleared up at once had that been done. I'm glad, however, to hear it's all put straight, and what's more, that the Colonel really had the honesty to tell what he discovered. We shall end by liking that man, I foresee, in spite of his disagreeable exterior. Emily has always stood up for him from the first, and says there's a great deal of good in him, hidden by a very tyrannical temper."

"I daresay she's right," answered Cecil; "but in the meantime he has allowed that temper so to get the better of him as to cause him to do a mischief he will find it very hard to repair. I wish we could get news of Anstruther, and find out what has become of him."

"I'll tell you what," said Villars, after a pause, during which he appeared to be think-

ing earnestly; "Emily has a brother who is going out to Queensland by the next steamer; he sails in a day or two, but still I think a letter would catch him before he leaves, and we might direct him to make inquiries for our friend the first thing on his landing. Wouldn't that do?"

"The very thing!" cried Cecil, while Leveston looked up with a little more interest than he had yet taken in the conversation, and asked, languidly, if he could be found and return in four months.

"Hardly so soon," Villars answered; "for no doubt he will be up the country. I should not think it possible for him to be back in less than half a year."

Leveston shook his head and sighed as he heard the answer, knowing as he did that his hold on life would hardly last so long; whilst Villars went off to get the letter written, to which in a few days he received an answer, posted just before young James sailed, saying that "he would use every exertion to discover his brother-in-law's old comrade."

In the meantime, Houston's upright behaviour about his error had excited various and conflicting comments amongst the officers of the regiment; some pronouncing him a brick, and not half a bad fellow, whilst others sneered and said, "Very well contrived. He knew it must have come out some day, so thought it best to do the noble dodge, and tell himself." But it was certainly those whose principles were most doubtful that thus accused their superior.

Fine times all the young and gay spirits in the regiment had of it, too, under Major Cardew, who was a most easy-going officer, and who took Houston's command in his absence. Houston, who had resolved to go southwards, and spend his leave in some radiant clime, where the beauties of nature, both animate and inanimate, might wean his soul from the loved and unattainable, set sail in his beautiful yacht, the *Swallow*, for the sunny shores of the Mediterranean. There was everything on board to please the eye and wile away the time. He had even that wildest and merriest fellow in the service, Dalton, of the —th, on board,

going out to join his regiment at Malta ; but he was sick at heart ; the gayest song, the wittiest jest—and with these his companion abounded—hardly called up an answering look on his dark face ; his brow remained always sad, his gloomy unfathomable eyes never relaxed into a smile.

“ What’s come to that fellow Houston ? ” mused Dalton one evening, watching the Colonel as he leant against the bulwarks gazing vacantly at the waves following each other in the vessel’s wake. “ He used to be as jovial a comrade as any in the service, and now he’s insupportable. For my own sake I must find out what it’s all about, and see if I can cheer him up. There’s nothing like doing a good action for one’s own interests. By-the-by, wasn’t there some story about a girl he’d fallen desperately in love with ? I think Dumbleton told me something of Houston’s having paid him a bet I heard them making about this girl, which was a proof she had added him to her list of victims. But what’s making him so down ? I shouldn’t have said Houston was the man to let any other fellow take her from him. That’s the clew, however,

and I'll soon read the riddle now I've gone so far."

Having arrived at this conclusion, Dalton threw the end of his cigar into the sea, and taking Houston by the arm, began walking him up and down the deck, talking gaily the while, and striving, without success, to divert his companion's thoughts from the gloomy subject that engrossed them.

Stopping suddenly, when he saw his efforts were vain, Dalton planted himself in front of his host with a quick determined movement that for a minute attracted Houston's attention.

"This won't do," said the young fellow peremptorily. "Do' you call this the proper way to treat a man?—for, by 'Jove! I don't. There were two or three fellows dying to take me out, and I gave the preference to you, because you had the character of being such a jolly companion, and a first-rate skipper; and now, when I'm here hard and fast with you, out on the briny deep, and far removed from all hope of succour, you take a fit of moping, moonstruck madness, which I can only account

for by supposing you're in love; and I ask you, as a human creature and a gentleman, was it fair to beguile a fellow into sailing with a man in love? If I'd known what to expect, do you think for one minute I'd have gone in for it? A man in love enough to mope! Can anything more irrational be conceived? Come, man, if you can't have her don't be down. There are plenty fairer, that may prove more attainable in the land to which we're going."

"Hush, Jack!" cried Houston quickly. "I believe, as you say, I've treated you badly, but I had an idea you wanted to get out as soon as possible, and as the *Swallow* is the fastest boat out, I thought I was doing you a service. But don't talk of love, there's a good fellow, for you know nothing about it, except with regard to yourself, and it riles me to hear you speak of it."

"The skipper's mad," muttered Jack Dalton, "telling me I don't know anything about love—I who broke into a Turk's harem near the Sweet Waters once, and carried off the black-eyed girl who used to throw me out messages

in flowers. I was very spoony about her for a time, as he might remember, and was near getting broke for my pains, the old heathen kicked up such a dust about it. But the man's mad, that's certain, and I'm afraid I was a fool for my pains when I came aboard this tight little craft, though she does leave the waves behind her like the bird she is named after."

"If you won't compare your passion for the Leilas and Zuleikas of Turkish harems with my love for this girl, I'll tell you about it," said Houston at length; and then he related to his volatile companion all that the reader already knows.

"And will you tell me what you left for just now?" asked Dalton, when he had finished. "The father is dying, and is anxious the girl should marry you; she has no protector, and will be glad in the end to obey her father, and take you, to provide herself with a home. You certainly are the most foolish fellow I ever met, to think of leaving when the game was just in your own hands, particularly when absence agrees with you so badly as it seems to do.

My advice is, crowd all sail, take me on to Malta, and go back across France, leaving the master to bring home the *Swallow*. If you make haste, and act energetically, you may have married her long before that fellow returns from Australia—if, indeed, he ever does.”

“I believe you are right,” answered Houston. “I feel I cannot go on in this way. It is my destiny, whilst life remains in me, to strive for her; and I only feel as though I lived whilst I am in her presence, and working to gain her.”

Acting on this advice, Houston returned to Athlone before two months had elapsed, to the great surprise of all his subordinates, who knew he had three months’ leave, and who had certainly not expected him back before it had expired, thinking, very likely, he might apply for an extension, and remain away longer.

The sick man was still lingering on, much as when Houston left, and greeted his Colonel’s return with evident delight.

“I am so glad to see you!” he sighed, with his faint, low voice, when Houston entered his room. “I was better for a little while after

you left, but I am worse now, and I don't think I can last much longer."

He did linger on, nevertheless, till two months more were past, when Mrs. Villars heard from her brother, who had arrived in Queensland, and had at once begun the inquiries she had directed him to make.

It was not necessary to pursue the investigations far, however, as the whole country was ringing with the particulars of the failure of an ill-fated expedition that had started for the interior of the continent some time before. They had not returned, and no tidings of them had reached the settlements for many months. Just before young James arrived, however, a second expedition, following in the same track, had come on all that remained of those concerned in the first enterprise. They had perished, evidently of thirst, in a wide expanse of desert, though only a day's march from water, which would have saved them, had they but known of it. There they all were, some lying in the camp, others at different distances outside it, as though they had straggled off in

search of that for want of which they were perishing. Nine men in all had started, and nine whitened skeletons, with fragments of tattered garments still covering them, and waving in the wind, were found on and around that ghastly camping-ground. The native dogs had fattened on their flesh, the kites had picked their bones, but otherwise they had been left to lie as they fell, there being no traces of human footsteps near, nor any indication of the thievish blacks having plundered their remains.

Amongst those who started on this fatal trip, there had been a new arrival of the name of Anstruther. He had been but a short time in the colony, and there was no doubt of his identity with their friend, the description coinciding completely.

Cecil was sitting with Emily Villars when this letter arrived, and she recognised at once the foreign postmark. Breathlessly she watched her friend's face as she glanced over the closely-written sheets; and when she saw its expression sadden with every word read, a terrible foreboding of coming trouble seized her,

and falling on her knees beside Mrs. Villars, she exclaimed,

"There is bad news!—I know there is!—tell me quickly, for heaven's sake!"

"My poor child," answered Emily Villars, throwing her arms round the trembling girl, "it is all over—he will return no more."

"No more!" repeated the girl, pressing her hands to her heart, and gazing round her wildly; "he will return no more! He is gone, then; gone without knowing his innocence had triumphed; gone without knowing I was faithful; gone without tasting the happiness life had in store for him! Gone, and I am left waiting—waiting till the day of release comes, and I shall meet him at last. Oh! pray for me that that day may come quickly!" She laid her head on her friend's shoulder; her whole frame trembled excessively, but no tears relieved her; misery seemed to have burned them up, and her bright hollow eyes had a scared unnatural look. "Read me what he says," she went on, at length. So her friend read her the short account of the luckless expedition, and

the certainty that he was of the party. "There is only papa now," she said, at length, rising, "and he won't be with me long. I must go to him. Pray for me, for I have no heart left."

And thus she went back to her father, and told him all, with the same wild scared face, the same unnatural light in her glorious eyes. But her composure never failed her; she was like a marble statue, and though day by day she faded to a beautiful transparent shadow, her spirit kept her up, and she waited on and watched over the dying man as usual.

To Houston she was more gentle, when she came across him, or was forced to speak to him; and once he took courage to say to her—

"I am more grieved than I can express that my discovery was made too late. I shall never forgive myself for having been so hasty in the matter."

"You are not to blame, I suppose," she answered, wearily; "you did what was right, as soon as you discovered the wrong that had been committed, and that is all that can be expected of you."

"Don't speak to me in that way, Queen," he replied; "I do blame myself bitterly——"

"Never call me by that name," she cried, passionately; "it was he first gave it me, in the days when I was his little child friend, and I will not hear it from your lips."

"Very well," he answered, sadly, "it shall be as you wish;" and he went out, hoping less than ever, yet still more determined to persevere.

CHAPTER VI.

A SAD BRIDAL.

ABOUT two weeks after the news had arrived of Anstruther's death in the Australian bush, and while those who had known him still talked of and lamented his loss, a manifest and decided change began to show itself in Leveston.

He knew death was very near, and, as he had said often before, Cecil's fate was the only thing that troubled him. Full of this idea, he began the subject one day, when Houston was sitting with him, and when Cecil, as was her custom on these occasions, was working in another room.

"Are you still as anxious as ever, Houston, to have my little girl? Her troubles have

changed her sadly of late, and you may not desire her now, broken-spirited and faded, for a wife, as you did in the days when she was the gay and lovely Queen of the Regiment."

"As I loved her then," answered the Colonel, "so I love her now, only with tenfold more devotion, for I feel that I, in a great measure, am the cause of her troubles, and where shall I find a nobler, fairer, truer woman than this whom I have striven so long to win. Oh! if she were but mine, time would heal her regrets for the dead, and she would learn to love me. Let who will despair, I must still wait in hope."

"She will have no money, you know," went on Leveston. "I am encumbered with debt, and have been putting off the settlement of my affairs year after year. I doubt if she will have a thousand pounds, and I have no one in whose charge to leave her, if she does not marry you. I think she will; even if I can prevail on her at the last moment, you will take her by my dying bed, will you not, Houston?"

"Will I not!" he answered. "Were I dying myself, that happiness would give me new life."

Whenever or wherever she will have me, I am willing to take her."

So it was arranged with Houston, and the next time Leveston was alone with his daughter, he reverted again to the subject that had so often been discussed between them.

"Darling," her father began, "I don't want to trouble you, and indeed you have had enough of pain and grief lately, but now I must speak about that which presses on my mind. In a day or two at most I shall be gone. What I have to say, therefore, I must say at once, and clearly. I have not been as good a father to you, my child, as I should have been. I have lived a self-indulgent life, and wasted the money that might have made you independent and comfortable when I am gone. You will not have enough to keep you in the necessities of life ; and I have no relatives who would be willing to take you, and treat you as their own. There is but one way of providing for you that I see before me. I have often pointed it out to you, and you were not willing to please me then in the matter. Now, when I speak to you

from my death-bed, and implore you to grant me the happiness of seeing you safe in the care of one so devoted, surely you cannot refuse to marry Houston."

"Oh! father," she cried piteously, "anything but that!—anything but that! I cannot marry. I can bear poverty, and work for my bread as a governess, as other girls have done before me, but this I must not do. Don't ask me, father."

"I have set my heart on it," he answered; "and I cannot die till my wish is accomplished. Don't keep me lingering here so long. I am weary of my life. Have pity on me and let me go."

"Father! father!" she cried wildly, "why must I sacrifice myself? I tell you that man is abhorrent to me! He is the murderer of my love, as surely, in truth, as though he had killed him with his own hand, for he sent him out to the country where he met his death. The curse of God would be on me if I married a man I hated!"

"If Houston is his murderer, I am also," groaned the dying man, "for I believed him

guilty, and joined with those that condemned him; and, don't you see, child, we only did our duty, as it seemed to us, and we are not criminal because we were deceived. Besides, do you remember a promise you made me, not long after I met with this accident—I asked you to do something for me that would allow me to die happy, but said I would not tell you what it was till the time came when I should require the sacrifice of you, and you promised. Do you remember?"

"I remember," she murmured, faintly; "but, oh! not this—anything but this, my father!"

He turned away his head, that he might not see her grief—it troubled him; but obstinate, as weak men often are, he was determined to carry his point, saying to himself, "She will bless me for it some day." He therefore went on, "This is all I ask, Cecil. It is a little thing to do to please a dying father; and my time gets shorter and shorter. I fear I have not many hours to live. Oh! my child," he added, raising himself, and stretching out his hands towards her with sudden energy, "I long to

depart in peace. Will you not do this much to ensure it?"

She rose from her kneeling position by her father's bedside, and paced the room once or twice in an agony, then she turned towards him and answered,

"Why should I care so much about my happiness in this miserable life?—and surely God will pardon my sin, if I commit it to secure my father's rest. I will try to do as you wish, if you do it quickly. But don't let me think over it, or I shall go mad. That may be my fate in the end," she muttered.

As soon as she had promised, the fitful energy that had supported her father died away, and he fell back on his pillow, gasping with difficulty, "Send, or it will be too late."

Mechanically she sent for the Colonel, and there, by the bedside of the dying man, they were made man and wife, he gazing at them with happy eyes, from which the power of sight was surely passing, or he could not have failed to observe the look of horror and pain on the girl's wan, thin face, when her lover, now be-

come her husband, placed the ring on her slender finger.

As the last words were spoken, and the blessing pronounced, he whispered faintly, "My child, I am happy," sighing out his life with the words.

Uttering a wild shriek, the new-made wife sprang forward, and fell on her face across the corpse. Gently her husband tried to raise her, and take her from the room; but she pushed him from her with sudden energy, saying, "Leave me alone with him whilst I have him. I shall go mad if you remain! Mad!" she repeated in a whisper, pressing her hand to her throbbing forehead. "I think I am so already!"

And this was the end for which Houston had toiled and striven. He almost told himself, as he turned from the room, it would have been better for him he had never been born, than have gained his wish in that fashion. But after he had recovered a little from the shock of the dreadful scene, he began again to take courage. The human heart is so prone to hope, so slow to despond, that his kept whispering, "She is

yours now. You love her wholly and devotedly. She will surely return your affection in time."

For the present, however, he seemed further than ever from obtaining what he wished ; for as soon as Leveston's death became known, Emily Villars went over and obtained admittance to the room where the bereaved girl was. She was lying, as Houston had seen her last, across her father's body ; her Irish maid, unable to prevail upon her to move, had thought it best to leave her alone until some friend should come who would have influence over her.

With great difficulty Mrs. Villars drew her from the room ; but even when that was accomplished, it was still necessary she should have companionship, and some one to look after her. Her mind was in so desperate and unsettled a state, her friend feared that she might indeed lose her reason altogether if any fresh blow fell on her. Therefore she stopped with her day after day, and night after night, untiring in her care and watchfulness of the stricken girl, until the funeral was over, and her father's body had been consigned to its long resting-place.

All this while Mrs. Villars had not dared to approach the subject of Cecil's marriage, though it was well known and freely discussed throughout the regiment. Nor had she allowed Houston to see her, though he called constantly to inquire, full of anxiety to be permitted to make himself useful in some way.

"I am afraid it is a bad business, that marriage," she said to her husband one day, when she saw him for a few minutes, whilst Cecil was dozing in the next room.

"It's a sin, nothing less," he answered, vehemently, "forcing her to take him at such a time. If I had been Mr. Fowler, I'd have refused to perform the ceremony, seeing her in such a state. He says himself it was the most painful thing he ever witnessed."

"Then why on earth did he lend himself to helping it on?" asked his wife, indignantly. "But I suppose I must speak to her now about it, though I confess I'm afraid. I can't quite make out whether she remembers all that happened, or not."

"She has no money," went on Villars. "The

poor fellow that's gone was tremendously dipped, and the little property there was must be sold. I fear if she has a few hundreds it will be all. Not that that matters now, as there were no settlements, and Houston can give her what he likes. I don't fancy he'll grudge her anything, however; that's his one good point—he's desperately in love with her."

"I wish he hadn't been, I know," answered his wife, with a sigh; "then this horrible marriage could never have taken place, and she'd at least have been free to choose for herself, whatever she wished, then."

So Emily Villars went back to her friend, feeling decidedly frightened at the task before her; but there was no help for it, and she began.

"Cecil, darling, can you remember anything about what happened to you when you met with this dreadful blow?"

The girl shuddered, and looking straight before her, with a pale, horrified face, she answered,

"Remember! It is all written with letters of fire on my brain! How shall I escape from it!"

"My poor child!" Emily replied, pretending not to notice the abhorrence in her tone, "it was indeed a dreadful time to choose for such a ceremony; but at least it made happy the father who loved you."

At the mention of her father's name she fell on her friend's neck, and tears that had not visited her eyes since her last worst troubles began, flowed in torrents, relieving her overwrought brain.

"Oh! Emily," she cried, "let me go with you. I cannot live with that man, I am almost mad at times, and I feel I should then lose my reason altogether. Let me stay with you. I will be no trouble, and I am sure Villars would not refuse me."

"My darling!" Mrs. Villars answered, greatly distressed, "don't you see that is impossible? He could compel us to give you up to him, and we could not withhold you from him. No, there is but one course to pursue now, and I fear at first you will find it a hard one—that is, to do your duty bravely, because it is your duty. Listen to me, dear, a minute. I know you are

a sensible girl, and one who thinks of what is right before she acts; for Hedworth has told me many pieces of advice you have given him which prove this. Think, therefore, what counsel you would give another in this position, and follow it. To do one's duty in any situation well and truly carries its own reward; but I think that you, in this matter, may in time hope for a better recompense than the empty satisfaction of knowing you have done as you ought."

"Don't say any more about it," Cecil answered, rising hastily, and twisting up her hair, which had fallen in glistening masses about her shoulders. "I have thought, and I have taken my resolution; if you are ever hereafter tempted to think me in the wrong, try to believe that I am acting for the best. Your kindness I can never forget, nor your dear good husband's either. To-morrow Colonel Houston shall know my decision; that will be soon enough, won't it?"

"I'm sure it will do very well," Emily Villars replied. "I have not heard him speak on the matter until to-day, but I knew it was

time that some arrangements should be made for you, as you cannot continue to occupy these rooms any longer."

"I suppose not," she answered; "but now, dear, let me be alone for the rest of the evening. I have a headache, and must rest a little, with all I have got before me to-morrow."

Emily Villars left then, and went back to the barracks, telling her husband, as she walked along, all that had passed, and of the poor girl's wild prayer to be allowed to live with them; how she had showed her that was impossible, and that then she had grown calmer, and said she would arrange matters with Houston to-morrow. "After all, it may turn out better than we expected," she added; but her husband only shook his head and answered,

"Out of such an aversion as hers no happiness can grow."

When her friend left, Cecil rose, took a sheet of notepaper, on which she wrote a few words, folded it, placed it in an envelope, directed it to Colonel Houston, and laid it in a conspicuous position on the table. She then put on her

new mourning walking-dress, which she had never before had occasion to wear, took a small sum of money, amounting in all to about thirty pounds, that was in her possession, for housekeeping expenses, out of which she placed some on the table in an envelope directed to the maid-servant ; then, putting on her hat, and taking an old black garden one in her hand, she tied a thick veil over her face, and prepared to leave the house.

Before making these arrangements, however, she had called the servant, sending her out on a message, and telling her she was going to bed, and must not be disturbed till the morning. It was now about nine o'clock, and quite dark ; the maid was still out, so, creeping to the door, the poor girl opened it cautiously and peeped out. Everything was still ; she passed through, closed the door behind her, and in a minute or two was hurrying along in the direction of the lake. Reaching a lonely deep part of the river, where the banks rose rather steeply above the water, she threw her hat into an eddy, that she saw would

float it back to the shore a little further down ; and having done this to elude pursuit, and cut herself off for ever from all the friends of her youth, she put on the old hat she had been carrying in her hand, tied her veil again over her face, and took a cross-road in the direction of a small station some miles further on.

Her long rides about the country had made her familiar with every lane and byroad, so that she reached the little station in time for the first morning train, and, with a foresight hardly to be expected in her present state of mind, took a ticket for Mullingar only ; for, she argued, if they do inquire about me, and hear there was anyone so early this morning asking for a ticket to Dublin, they might suspect something—now they'll only think it was a country-woman going in to market.

At Mullingar she took her ticket on to Dublin ; and finding the train she was travelling by was the mail, she determined to pursue her journey to London at once ; for it was to that great city she was now directing her steps,

thinking, justly, that there she should have a better chance of being irretrievably hidden from sight than anywhere else. In a few hours more, she was plunging across the channel, on board one of the mail steamers. The morning was stormy, but she, being accustomed to long voyages, did not feel inconvenienced by the rolling of the vessel, and, remaining on deck, continued to meditate over the state of her affairs.

Suddenly an idea seemed to strike her, for, glancing hurriedly around, she pulled off her glove, and seeing there was no one there to observe her movements, slipped off the wedding-ring Colonel Houston had placed on her finger a few days before. Then, leaning over the side of the vessel, she dropped the golden symbol of her bondage into the seething waters, watching it, as it sank, with a passionate feeling of relief that that token of the man she abhorred should trouble her sight no more.

Now she was virtually dead and gone to all her friends; they could not believe anything

but that, and she had the world before her where to choose. But what should she do for her support? A governess, she well knew, she could not be without a recommendation, and that, whilst dead to her friends, it was impossible to obtain. The only employment she thought herself fit for was, perhaps, a situation as work-woman in some milliner's ware-room. That was a toilsome life, she knew, but it did not seem possible any other was in store for her; and bad as it might be, it was at least better than the life-long misery of being Colonel Houston's wife.

Whilst she was thinking these sad thoughts, and planning these weary schemes, her maid was going into her room to call her at the usual time. Seeing the bed had not been slept in, the notes lying on the table, and her mistress's out-of-door dress missing, a faint suspicion of what might be the case stole upon her mind; but without stopping to examine the letters, she determined to run across to Mrs. Villars, as it might be her young lady had only gone there to spend the night.

Emily Villars, whose toilette was not yet completed, hearing her friend's maid was very anxious to speak to her, had her shown up; and whilst still continuing to coil up the masses of her beautiful brown hair, asked what was the matter.

"Please, mum," said the girl nervously, "is the mistress stopping with you, mum? For she haven't slept in her own bed this blessed night, mum, and I do be afeared she may have gone away altogether." Here the maid, who was really fond of her kind young mistress, put her apron up to her eyes and began to sob.

"Don't be a fool!" said Emily Villars, rather sharply, dropping all her hair out of her hands again. "Speak out clearly. You don't mean to tell me Miss Leveston—Mrs. Houston, I mean," she corrected herself,—“is not in her own house now?”

"Indeed she's not, mum; and there's two letters a-lying on the table, which I didn't touch, for fear of doing mischief, but I came on here to you straight, mum, thinking as how Miss Cecil might be with you."

"Wait there a minute," Mrs. Villars answered, going to speak to her husband; "I'll be back presently, and tell you what you must do. Oh! Hedworth," she cried, entering her husband's room, "that poor child has run away, to avoid Colonel Houston, I suppose; but, at any rate, she is gone. What ought we to do?"

"I see nothing for it but to run down to Houston at once, tell him what has happened, and try and prevail on him to make some terms with the poor girl, whenever she is discovered, that shall enable her to live without molestation from him until her mind gets a little more settled. Her calmness yesterday when you spoke to her evidently proceeded from this resolve. I'll take Mary with me; she may help us in our search."

In a very short space of time Houston and Villars were at the house, and on the table found the notes lying, as Mary had mentioned; one of them was addressed to her, the other, as we know, to Colonel Houston.

Seizing his, Houston tore it open with trembling fingers, and an agonised, expectant look

on his dark face. There were but a few words, without beginning or ending—merely these words:—

“Forget and forgive me. Farewell.”

“What does she mean?—where has she gone?” cried Houston, holding out the sheet in his trembling hands to Villars. “Oh! why did she treat me thus? My poor darling! I had never meant to drive her to this! I only told your wife yesterday that I should like to speak to her to-day, and this is what happens. In heaven’s name, Villars, what am I to do?”

“Come with me, and let us make inquiries at the station first. If we can trace her—and indeed I have no doubt we shall be able to do so—you will have to avoid appearing before her for some time, and allow my wife and me to arrange matters between you. But first let us see what she has said to Mary.”

Mary, on opening her envelope, found only the small amount of wages due to her, with a trifle over—not a word besides.

“Oh! sir,” sobbed the faithful attendant to Villars, “she has taken nothing except the

clothes she had on her back. Everything is there," pointing as she spoke to a large wardrobe that stood near them.

"See if she has taken her ornaments and valuables," said Villars. "We shall be able to understand better what she means to do when we know that."

"There is nothing gone, sir," answered the maid, after a brief search; "everything is here."

"Was there any money in the house?" asked Villars again, after a puzzled pause,—“any but this left to you, I mean.”

"I think not, sir," the girl answered. "I didn't know even she had that same, for last night, when she sent me out to get a pound of candles (we'd run out of them, sir), she took out her purse to give me the money, and it was as good as empty, all but a few shillings."

"Then she can't be far off," mused Villars; while Houston stood gazing at her last words to him, with a heart-rending expression of countenance. "She can't have gone by train," went on Villars, "as she had no money to get a ticket; probably she has set off on foot

to walk to Dublin. We shall find her if we scour the country around well, of that I am convinced ; but first we'll make inquiries at the station. Come, Houston."

Mechanically the stricken man obeyed his companion, first, however, carefully folding the few lines as he had received them, and placing them in his pocket ; then he went out with Villars, and they proceeded to the railway.

No tidings could be obtained of her there, and nothing now remained but to organise a regular search throughout the countryside. This was done, parties being sent in every direction. All her friends, and she had many, joined in the quest. No doubt traces of her would have been discovered if they had asked at the stations eight and nine miles up and down the line, but this they did not think of doing, being firmly persuaded she was without money. Even had the look-out for her been kept up for a few days longer, tidings would have been obtained of the place where she had taken the train ; but even on the first day traces of her were discovered, as she

had intended, that stopped all further search.

The hat that she had thrown into the river was found caught in some sedges, not far from the spot whence she had dropped it. It was evidently a lady's hat, and that of a person in deep mourning. Villars was with the party who discovered it, and a wild horror shot through him as he looked at the pretty dainty work of nimble fingers, now soaked through, draggled and dirty. It was very late in the evening at the time it was found, and getting rapidly dark; it would be impossible to do much more that night. Besides, Villars felt a terrible conviction creeping over him that they had arrived at the end of their anxieties, and that the fate of the poor girl was abundantly proved.

His fears were confirmed by Mary, who recognised the hat as one that her young mistress had received, with other things, a day or two before. There was now no room for doubt that the poor child, goaded by grief and horror, had lost her reason, and had sought rest from all her troubles under the smooth rippling

waters of the Shannon. It was so, there could be no room for hope or doubt, and Villars, remembering the expression of Colonel Houston's face as he read her farewell words that morning, shrank from the task of breaking this discovery to him.

During the livelong day the Colonel had kept up the search with untiring energy; going alone for the most part, and never ceasing his inquiries, or stopping for a moment to rest his weary limbs. Even now he had not returned, and thanking heaven for this respite, Villars ran across to his quarters, to tell his wife what he knew, and consult with her who would be the best person to break the news to the bereaved man.

"I dare not do it, I tell you" he went on. "I fear greatly the consequences of his knowing to what a deed his cruel persistence has driven her. It would have moved a heart of stone to see the way in which he looked at those few simple words to-day that breathed not one sentiment of pity or love."

"A sad, sad thing it is indeed, dear," an-

answered Emily; "think what a state the girl's mind must have been in before she attempted this—how goaded and tortured; how great her horror of her husband! I pity her, but she is at rest, he is more to be felt for. If he survives the blow, he will for ever be haunted by remorse, and the accusing thought that he drove her to this. It was a cruel revenge to take, and I could almost blame her, but that it cost her her life. If you cannot tell the wretched man, however, try and persuade Major Paget to do so; he is kind-hearted, and will feel for one in such bitter sorrow as this."

Villars went to Paget's quarters, and told the terrible news, showing the proof of their truth, the stained, draggled hat he held in his hand. Then, indeed, Paget needed all his courage not to let the secret he had hidden so long escape him; but with a mighty struggle he mastered his emotion, and gasped,

"Are you sure that is hers, Villars? I cannot believe it; she was too brave, too noble-hearted to end her life, no matter how hard it might have been, in such a manner."

"It is indeed hers," he answered sadly. "I took care to find that out before saying anything; and now, what I have come to ask of you is this. You were her old friend, and knew her from childhood; you will be the fittest person to break this discovery to her husband. Take it and show it to him; make him understand that all hope is over, but be gentle with him, for already he seems overwhelmed, whilst he doesn't know half the horror that is before him."

"I will do my best," replied Paget, simply. "Where is he?"

"He has not returned yet; but if you go to his rooms, no doubt you will see him the minute he comes back."

Then Paget took from Villars' hand the last relic of the woman he had loved, and went out with a heavy heart to meet the man who had been his unconscious rival.

The Colonel was not in, so, sitting down in his room, the Major fell into a sad reverie about her whom he had loved, and who was now lost for ever. Not to him only—that, after all, was

but what he had expected—but to all who had loved and admired her, and to all the bright and beautiful world around, in which she had lived such a short, troubled life. He thought of her as he had first known her, a little, toddling, bright-eyed thing, when he was a wild young fellow, always ready for a game of play with the baby, and for whom she had always manifested a special liking. Then the years passed slowly in review before him, as she grew from the baby into a child—the Child of the Regiment—from the child into the girl, from the girl into the young lady. He recalled how she had passed through all these changes, still retaining her supremacy over the hearts of those around, dazzling and bewitching all who came in contact with her, unconscious, apparently, of her influence, which had ended so fatally for her by exciting this persevering passion in a man like Colonel Houston. He could have wept over the crushed and battered hat that had so lately covered her beloved head, but he feared intrusion, and dreaded, above all things, that his secret should be sur-

prised; he had guarded it jealously and well till now—he would carry it with him to the grave.

As he gazed on it, with mournful eyes, a crape bow, that had become unfastened, and was nearly dropping off, attracted his attention. "That, at least, I will have," he muttered, pulling it off and hiding it hurriedly, for an approaching footstep warned him he would not be long alone. In truth, he had hardly secreted it, when the door opened, and Houston, worn out, haggard, and wretched, appeared before him. There were lights in the room, and he, coming in out of the darkness, was dazzled, and for a moment did not notice the Major, as he sat quiet, watching the movements of the man in whom these few hours of agony had made so great an alteration that, had his companion met him elsewhere, he would not have recognised him.

Suddenly Houston, turning, saw the Major's white, set face looking towards him with a most unusual expression of pain and horror on it.

"Tell me," he gasped, approaching hurriedly, "have you heard anything of her? Has she been found?"

"This is all that has yet been recovered," Paget answered, rising, and laying the hat on the table. "Villars has gone out again to continue the search for the rest."

He spoke coldly and sternly, using no circumlocution, nor trying in any way to soften the blow. His own heart was too sore for that. Why should he spare this man, who had brought such misery on them all?

At the sight of the black dripping object which Paget laid on the table, Houston stepped forward, and leant for a minute over it, to discover what it was; then, as the full meaning of all it revealed burst upon him, he threw his arms up over his head, crying wildly, "Oh! my God! not that—not that!" and fell heavily to the ground, as one dead.

For a minute Paget gazed at him, lying like a corpse at his feet; he was so stupefied with astonishment at the fearful effect of his unguarded words and action, for he had taken no

warning from the man's agonized face, but had said out, with short and cruel distinctness, all there was to say. Then he bent over him, and raised him tenderly, for the tie of a common anguish was between them, and his heart was moved to pity even this man at such a time. But the blow had been too cruel and sudden : consciousness would not return, and when the doctor, who was quickly summoned, appeared, he pronounced the Colonel's life in danger from congestion of the brain.

Perhaps, after all, a merciful Providence ordered this illness in pity for the bereaved man, who, at least, was spared the misery of days and nights of expectation, whilst the river was being dragged in vain, for no other trace of the lost one could be discovered ; and, after many trials, the search was given up. All this while, when others toiled and strove, the strong man, stricken down in his prime, lay, unconscious of everything, on his sick-bed. Brain-fever had set in, and he moaned and raved incessantly of her who, had he known it, was lost to him for ever. Strange to say, in his delirium,

it always seemed to him that she was happy and friendly with him. He only remembered those old days before Anstruther's disgrace, when she had liked him so well; and all the dark, troubled intervening time had faded from his mind.

"Poor fellow!" said Villars, one day, returning to his wife, after having been in to see the sick man, "I fear, when he recovers his senses, and remembers all, he will never get over it. The doctors expect some change in a day or two, and have given the strictest orders that no one is to mention the subject before him when he becomes conscious."

There was no need for that caution—indeed, none dared approach the topic, when at length he became so far himself again as to know, and speak a word or two feebly, to those who came to see him; but his progress was very slow, and again and again the doctors gave him up for lost. His constitution was of iron—that alone carried him on; but the wish to live was so completely wanting, that it seemed he must die, simply because he did not care for life.

"How can we rouse him?" Doctor Everett said to Paget, and several others, one day. "The man interests me, and I should so like to save him if I could. There is absolutely nothing now against his recovery but the want of will to complete the cure."

No one answered—indeed, none knew what to do. There was but one thing he had cared for since they knew him, and that was gone. The Major, however, resolved he at least would speak to him. "I may rouse him to exertion," he thought, "or I may make him worse; but he must die if he goes on this way, so in any case it can do no harm my trying."

Accordingly, he went in soon after to see the invalid, and asked him, as usual, how he felt, receiving the usual answer, "Just the same."

"Come, Houston," said Paget, then, with an attempt at severity that failed completely, as he surveyed the wreck before him, "Everett says it is all your own fault that you are not up and about now. He says there is nothing to prevent your being well but the want of will. Be a man, determined you'll be ready to take

the field with your regiment, if necessary, in a month's time; and don't let your life slip through your fingers through want of will to retain it, just when matters are looking so promising for war on the Continent."

Paget spoke a great deal more cheerfully than he felt, but stirred up no corresponding enthusiasm in Houston's breast, who only answered, with a faint smile,

"If there was a chance of war to-morrow, I would take command, and die in battle, as a soldier should; but there is no such luck in store for me. Death would be welcome indeed. Can you wonder that I do not care to live?"

"I do wonder; and I tell you you are wrong," Paget answered, with a trembling voice, for he had made up his mind to tell this man his secret, if by any means his doing so might be of use. "Do you think," he went on solemnly, "that it is a manly or brave thing to shirk life because it is painful to you? How many poor human hearts there are that bear their burdens bravely, and toil along the highway of life, whilst their dearest hopes fall around them at every step.

There are many who have lost more than you, who have yet struggled on boldly, assuredly not because life, bereft of everything lovely, was sweet, but because they would not turn back like cowards from the hopeless waste before them."

"You can talk like that easily, Paget," Houston answered, slowly, though the words had evidently made an impression; "but you know nothing of what it is to lose the one you loved as I have done. Your life is fair and bright, and those for whom you care are around you still; others there may be who have suffered perhaps as I do, but none who have lost one so worthy of love."

"Do you think I know nothing of this your grief?" replied Paget, softly. "You are mistaken. She was as dear to me as to you; and I had known her longer; but I had not the right to sorrow as you had, and my love was unknown and unsuspected. Do you think, then, I had no cause for grief when I told you, my rival, what I knew, and restrained my anguish, which I had no right to exhibit, till my heart

felt as if it would burst? Believe me, there is no greater agony than watching a sorrow in which one would fain join, yet compelled by necessity to keep down emotion with an iron hand. You, at least, have suffered less, for you were unconscious. Let this confidence I have reposed in you be of some avail. Strive to overcome your grief, and meet what fate has in store for you like a man. Life may have much work for you yet."

Houston held out his hand to Paget as he answered,

"Major, I thank you for the trust you have shown in me, but you have no remorse mingling with your sorrow. I suffer all the more that I feel but for me this would never have happened. Oh! why did I pursue her so persistently when I saw her aversion to me? Better, far better would it have been that I should never have called her mine than that I should do so at such a price."

"You can't help regretting that, I know," Paget said, gently; "but, remember, remorse is in vain, and it is dangerous. Many a man has

been urged by it into additional crime. Seek rather to live to some purpose, and wipe out by good deeds the remembrance of this misery."

"I will try," he answered; "but I cannot feel the courage in me I once had to cope with life. If I recover, to what purpose will it be? Everything is hateful to me."

"Strength to bear will come in time, and work to do will no doubt be sent you," Paget replied. "Don't forget you have promised, and remember I have trusted in you."

So saying, the Major left, pretty sure the Colonel was at last aroused, but sad at heart in spite of all, for the conversation had called up painful recollections that he would willingly have put away from him for ever.

After that Houston regained strength slowly; but his recovery was long and tedious, for though, since Paget had spoken to him, he was ashamed to give way altogether, still the prospect of going about again in the world, as he had once done, was too distasteful to him to permit of any true or real wish for life.

At length, however, he was out, and able to

take up his duties ; but here the motive power failed him altogether. He could not walk about the streets and barracks where he had so often seen her light figure gliding before him ; he could not meet around him constantly the men who had held her in such high esteem, and who must, he knew, look upon him as the cause of her death ; he could not see everyone watch him with curious eyes as the man who had been at death's door because of her loss. All this was too bitter for him, and he resolved to sell out.

None of his brother-officers expressed much sorrow when they heard of this determination ; for though most of them thought better of him than formerly, and though his troubles had made him much less interfering and overbearing, they had also changed him into a gloomy, silent man, whose constant sorrow struck the lighter hearts around as a kind of unspoken reproach.

One of the saddest things in death is that, when those dearly and truly loved have been taken from us, there is so little change in life and all about us. We may weep, but the smiles

around are as gay, the sun shines as brightly, the everyday duties come as regularly, the chit-chat of the world is repeated as merrily, as if the lost one out of the small loved circle had never been missed or mourned. Sometimes, when the sense of loss comes home to the heart with its fullest force of conviction, the pulses seem to stand still for a minute with horror at the little outward change that loss has made. The sun should have veiled itself in blackness; the thousand voices of earth and air should have been hushed to silence; the jests on gay lips died unspoken, in answer to the passionate wail of the bereaved heart. And yet it was not so. Nature had no sympathy, and even human friends would try to call the old smile to pallid lips that would fain forget for ever that smiles had ever been. But the world demands the sacrifice; the sorrow must be confided to the innermost room of the heart, where strangers never come; and only in the dead of night, when the deep throbbing silence of solitude reigns around, dare we take the lost one from the hiding-place, and remember all that once was.

Houston felt this as many a weary soul has done before, and he loathed the men once her friends, who soon chatted as gaily as ever. He longed always to be alone with his sad remembrances, and for this end, and to avoid contact with what reminded him of her before the world, he determined to leave the army.

He sold out and left them, saying alone to Paget, as he bade farewell, "You must come and see me sometimes. I shall always have a welcome for you." And thus he passed from the regiment, becoming a wanderer on the face of the earth, living almost entirely aboard his yacht, pursuing the Summer from clime to clime, like the bird his white-sailed boat was named after; rarely being seen in large cities, and for the most part avoiding the society of those who had known him in earlier and happier days.

The new Lieutenant-Colonel of the —th Dragoons was none other than Major Cardew, who, being an easy-going, good-natured fellow, was greatly liked, and promised soon to

rival Colonel Meredith in the affections of those who remembered that officer.

Villars, too, had gained promotion lately, and was now a lieutenant; rather young in the service to be an old married man, as he would call himself, whenever his wife was not by. Her presence altered the case decidedly, as she objected strongly to such speeches, declaring that, when he made himself out an old man, he cast a reflection on her age also.

She was a great favourite with everyone, and though never attaining the lost Queen's place in the heart of the regiment, still enjoyed a large share of its regard.

Such was the end of the bright young life that had shed a brilliancy of love and merriment on all around; lost, as they believed, by her own act in the broad Shannon, sorrowed for truly for a time by all who knew her; then forgotten slowly but surely, as it is the fate of all things on this earth to be.

CHAPTER VII.

IN LONDON.

IN the meantime, whilst distracted friends sought her everywhere with anxious care, the fugitive had arrived in London, and for a moment felt perfectly bewildered when she found herself alone in that large and bustling city. She had a brave heart, however, now she was free from the fear of her husband's pursuit; and after a short rest in the waiting-room, to collect her thoughts, and decide on the course of action she should pursue, she rose, tied her veil again over her face, and leaving the terminus, struck off into the streets.

Her first care must be to find herself some lodging, cheap and poor, but not in too bad a locality; for whilst she had four-and-twenty

pounds in her pocket, she could not feel the necessity for very strict economy. It seemed to her a mine of boundless wealth, and it would be hard to say how long she expected it should last her. She was a little undeceived after looking at a few lodgings, and finding what a high price they asked for the two rooms she thought necessary; so, after searching through numberless streets, and going up innumerable flights of stairs, she at last resolved to content herself with one apartment, and manage as best she could with that.

She returned, therefore, to a neat, quiet house she had looked at earlier in the day, in a retired street, and agreed with the lodging-house-keeper, a bustling, good-natured-looking body, to take one room by the week, paying the first week in advance. This was soon settled; and then, feeling very faint for want of food, the poor girl again went out, bought herself a roll, some tea and sugar, and a little earthenware teapot. With these treasures she made her way back to her lodging, and sat down to her lonely meal.

It was late in the evening ; she had taken no rest the night before, and she was very weary. Therefore, taking the precaution of putting her money under her pillow, she soon fell fast asleep.

She had not long fallen into the deep dreamless slumber of exhaustion when the landlady knocked quietly at the door. Her curiosity had been excited by the strange loneliness of this young and very beautiful girl. "My mind misdoubts me," she murmured, "that there is some sad story here. I'll go up and talk to the poor lamb a bit, perhaps she'll tell me her trouble—for she is in trouble, that's certain."

Her knock exciting no movement nor sign of life within, the good woman pushed the door open softly, and entered. A glance showed her the girl was asleep ; but shading the candle, so that the light should not fall on the sleeper's eyes, she advanced softly till she stood beside the bed, looking down on her new lodger's unconscious face. What a sweet, innocent face it was, with its masses of golden hair waving round it, the pale complexion now slightly

flushed with sleep, the long curled lashes resting on the thin cheek, and the hands, soft and small as a child's, clasped together on her chest. The landlady looked at these earnestly for a minute, then she muttered, as she turned away, "She has no wedding-ring. Perhaps I was mistaken; and there is nothing of that kind after all. Most like some poor orphan," she added, glancing at the deep mourning that lay on a chair, "who has no friends left her, and has to seek her living in this great wicked city. How many such poor, pretty, timid, innocent creatures come to seek their bread here every day; but they don't remain long innocent or pretty either. They are dragged down into all the misery and vice that lies hidden under the riches and prosperity of London; or, if they keep their purity, as some of them do through all, poverty, and toil, and want soon drag them down to the grave. But this girl can't be one of those I'm thinking of," she added, after handling her things. "These are all expensive articles, and must have cost a good penny altogether. I can't make it out. But perhaps

she'll tell me to-morrow." And so saying she left the room, as quietly as she had entered.

Cecil had given her name to the landlady as Miss Lacy, and that good woman seeing all her things marked C. L., believed that at least that portion of her lodger's story was correct, and went off, determined to draw as much out of the girl the next day as she was able; for though Mrs. Chatterton (such was her name) was a good and kind little body, she had a most lively and inextinguishable curiosity, and invariably examined all her lodgers' effects and letters, with a view to finding out all about them, for their own good, as she would satisfy her conscience by saying. Now the poor dear child she had taken in that day was most unaccountably wanting in any such mementoes of her past life; but still, for all that, so very young a girl could not have much to conceal; or, even if she had, she couldn't be a very great adept in the art of keeping a secret—at least, not when she had such an expert detective as Mrs. Chatterton to deal with. So the good woman assured herself; and next morning, just as Cecil

was rubbing her eyes, and telling herself she really must get up, this kind of thing wouldn't do in one who had to earn her bread, a knock was heard at the door.

"Come in," cried the girl, sitting up in bed, and trying hard to look as if she was almost dressed already—or at least would be in a minute or two.

"Please, mum," said a neat, but not very brisk-looking girl, putting in her head at the door, "Mrs. Chatterton's compliments, mum, and wants to know if Miss Lacy will take breakfast with her this morning."

"Oh! tell her with much pleasure. Is she waiting? Don't let her. I'll be down in a minute," ejaculated Cecil, all in one breath, springing up, and beginning to dress in a great hurry.

The servant went away, and soon after Mrs. Chatterton was gratified by the appearance of Miss Lacy, looking charmingly lovely, as the old woman thought, in her deep mourning, that set off the delicate beauty of her complexion to the best advantage. A very sad-looking

girl she was, in spite of her beauty, as, wishing her hostess good morning, she took her seat at the table in a downcast manner, that Mrs. Chatterton hardly thought called for in the presence of the good meal before her.

“Why, my dear Miss Lacy!” she cried presently, “you are eating really nothing. You will make me, an old woman, quite ashamed of myself. Take my advice, dear—it’s that of a person who has seen a little of the world—and it will carry you well through life—don’t let any trouble make you quarrel with your food. What is it makes the workman able to toil the whole length of the day, and go home hearty and happy at night? Why, his good wholesome food, of course; not them nasty drinks some of ’em takes. What is it makes them young ladies and gentlemen, as I goes sometimes for a day to see them take their airings in the park, so courageous and fool-hardy-like, a-racing and a-rampagin’ about on them wicked ’osses? Why, their food; and they have the best of it, certainly, not what the likes of you and I could get. And now I mind me, talking

of the park, I used to see a pretty lady, very like you, miss, a-gallopin' about as bad as any of them, about this time last year. My! but she did ride lovely; and my Jim—he's my son, is Jim—you'll see him some day—says to me one day he was with me, and we was a-watching of this young lady, 'Mother,' says he, 'that'll be Miss Rideout, the great circus woman I've heard tell of, that's just come to Astley's. I'll go and see her some day.' And you're the very moral of her, miss; but you're not like one of them nasty circus women, either, all painted and padded up like. Were you ever in the park, Miss Lacy?"

Cecil had hard work to keep from colouring at this point-blank question, but she answered calmly,

"Yes, I have been there pretty often."

"But never as a horse-rider?" asked Mrs. Chatterton, anxiously.

It must be confessed she had formed a much higher ideal of the social standing of her lodger than to bear with equanimity the thought that she was a circus-woman.

"I never was a circus-rider in my life," replied Cecil, equivocating, and to change the subject, added, "But you haven't finished what you were telling me about food."

"What was I saying?" cried the good woman, putting her hands to her head. "I declare to you, my dear, I was so upset to think perhaps you might be that pretty horse-rider I'd seen, that I have quite forgotten what I was talking about. I'm glad it wasn't you, however, for I know there's some as says horse-riding is next to immorality, and always leads to it. So eat a good breakfast, dear, and don't think of such things, for they're only a temptation and a snare to pretty young girls like you. Which it's a device of Satan, I do believe, as our minister says."

Sorrowful as she really felt, Cecil could not refrain from smiling at this curious confusion of ideas, and asked,

"Which is the device of Satan, dear Mrs. Chatterton?—the pretty girls or the riding?"

"Well, indeed, I don't exactly remember just now," answered the good landlady, with

a puzzled air, "but I know it's one or the other, or perhaps, indeed, maybe it's both. But don't be down-hearted, missie, for sure it's not your fault if you are that nice-looking; and if you're a modest, well-conducted young woman, it won't be reckoned against you in the end."

"I hope not," the poor girl replied, with a faint smile, thinking sadly that, although her new friend was not aware of it, this fatal gift of beauty had already caused her much sorrow. Could she hope to pass the rest of her life in peace? But it was no good reflecting about such things, so she roused herself, and asked, "Could you put me in the way of getting any work to do—to earn my living, Mrs. Chatterton, for I must not mislead you? I have only the little store I came with, and no hopes of getting any more unless I can find employment."

"Poor dear!" cried Mrs. Chatterton, compassionately; "I thought you were an orphan by your dress; but have you no friends or relations who would help you?"

"None at all," replied the girl, sadly; "I am dead to all my old friends, and to none of them could I go for assistance."

"But, my dear young lady," replied the landlady, quickly, "that is a bad state of affairs, and sounds as if there must be something wrong. Generally, when our friends forsake us, we must have been to blame, for them all to join in condemning us. Tell me what it is, my dear; perhaps I shall see a way to help you."

"I have done nothing wrong," Cecil answered, a little haughtily, and without perhaps considering that, though she might see no harm in her last step, others would do so. "I thank you for your great kindness," she added, "but if you cannot or will not help me, and if you desire to know more of my history than I think right to reveal, I must leave you, and go elsewhere."

As she spoke, she rose, and looked as though preparing to put her threat into execution. She was trembling with excitement and nervous agitation, and her beautiful eyes flashed angrily.

"There—there," cried Mrs. Chatterton, soothingly, "I didn't mean to annoy you, nor to hunt you from my house. You're but a child, after all, dearie, and can't have done much wrong; but if you were turned out into the London streets, you'd not be an innocent child long. So I'll do the best I can to help you, though I fear you'll find earning your bread hard work; for you've not been accustomed to stitching," she added, glancing at Cecil's hands.

The girl coloured, and put them under the table, saying, as she did so,

"I can work, I assure you. What I wanted was a place in some milliner's show-room, where I should have more fine ornamental work to do than absolute plain stitching, and I'm afraid that wouldn't pay."

"No, indeed, drat them sewing-machines, they've taken the bread out of lots of poor mouths; not to say but they do the work beautiful, and I'd a'most sooner wear it, if I was choosing, than the hand-work—it's so neat and regular. But let me think a minute, dear, till I see if I know anything would suit you."

After a pause of intense thought for some minutes, she went on,

“Just to think of it, now; I do believe I have the means of giving you as good a start in the millinery trade as any to be got in London. That’s to say, if they want hands, and you’re quick enough for them. But that’s what we must find out. You see, I’ve an aunt who’s forewoman at the great Frenchwoman’s shop, Madame Mercy’s, I think they call her. Not that I think a Frenchwoman’s a good place for a beautiful girl like you; it turns their heads with vanity, for to be sure them Frenchies is the very dressiest, conceitedest pieces I ever came across. I mind I went to see the trial of Madame Rachel, her as used to make people beautiful for ever, as she said; and how she could have thought herself beautiful I can’t tell, for she was as ugly an old woman as I ever laid eyes on, and a hard-looking old file into the bargain. Not that you need be afraid of getting like her at Madame Mercy’s, my dear, for it isn’t a place of that sort, and my aunt do tell me she could take no count of all the duchesses and

ladies, and all the tip-top people like that, that get all their things there; and she'll look after you, too, if I put you under her care, so I hope you'll be able to get a place."

"Thanks, a thousand times," answered Cecil, warmly, and yet with a slight feeling of stiffness. It seemed so unnatural to her she should be receiving favours from this woman, and be content to be patronized by one who but a few days ago would have been proud to be noticed by her. But she remembered in time that without this woman's good-natured help it would be very hard to get employment, and she could not help feeling that none but a really good-hearted person would have taken so much interest in an utter stranger. She said, therefore,

"I don't know how to thank you for your kindness to me. I hope you may never find me ungrateful. When do you think you will be able to find out about this situation?"

"This morning, as soon as the house has been put to rights, and I see that all my lodgers are comfortable, we'll take a cab and go to Madame Mercy's. I always like to see that everything

is done up tidy and neat before I stir out; and remember this, my dear, in case you ever come to keep lodgings yourself—which it isn't a bad business, if you once get a good name—always make those you have in your house as comfortable as you can, and they'll be sure to stick by you then, and send their friends when they're in want of anything of the kind."

Accordingly, about twelve o'clock in the day, they sallied out, and drove to Madame Mercier's. Mrs. Chatterton asked for the forewoman, and they were directed to the show-room, where they found her. On seeing her niece, she made them a sign to wait for a minute, as she was engaged in conversation with a customer; but when the lady left, after a somewhat lengthy injunction as to the arrangement of a dress she was ordering, Mrs. Jones came forward, and took them into her private room.

Here she affectionately kissed her niece, and it was evident, though much difference in years could not be perceived between them, that the fashionably-dressed lady in Madame Mercier's establishment was no whit ashamed of her

dowdily-dressed niece. Indeed they seemed really attached to each other, and Cecil had to stand by for fully ten minutes, whilst a cross-fire of questions and answers went on between them. At length Mrs. Chatterton exclaimed,

"Well, aunt, I suppose you're surprised to see me here? You know I don't often come, and though it seems an age since we've met, I shouldn't have been here to-day, only I want to ask a favour of you."

"Well, Maggie, what is it?" said Mrs. Jones, assuming a business-like air, for she felt her niece had not brought the girl dressed in black with her for nothing.

"It's just this, you see," began good Mrs. Chatterton, with some secret trepidation, for her aunt off business matters was one thing, and her aunt on business matters was another and very different thing. "This young lady here," indicating Cecil, who was sitting in the background, "is a friend of mine, and is very anxious to get employment in the millinery business. I told her I'd take her to you, and see what you could do for her."

"Have you ever been engaged in work of this sort before?" asked Mrs. Jones, turning to Cecil sharply.

"No, ma'am," she answered, nervously, for she now began to feel her utter ignorance must tell against her in an establishment of this kind, that could only afford to turn out *chef-d'œuvres* in whatever it attempted.

"Take off your veil," went on Mrs. Jones, still with great brevity and sternness of manner, that convinced the frightened girl, however nice she might be with her niece, she was a regular martinet with her work-girls.

Cecil did as she was told.

"Humph! you should have gone into a glove-shop, and you might have made your fortune," was all she remarked, as she surveyed with critical eyes the shrinking girl's delicate beauty.

"Oh! aunt, don't put such an idea into her head," cried Mrs. Chatterton in dismay—"and after I said that you would take care of her, if she came here."

"Take care of the work-girls' morals! Law,

Maggie, what a pretty piece of work you would give me, to be sure ! Not that I should keep a girl about whom I heard any bad stories, unless she was our best hand, and we couldn't do without her. But then I never 'try to rake up what the girls do, once they're out of my sight—that would be too much to put on any one woman's shoulder. But, as I was saying, this child's pretty enough for anything in one way, and, I'm afraid, too pretty to do much good in our business, once she's been a little in London. It's a bad place for a beautiful girl, that's a fact ; and only you're interested in her, Maggie, I couldn't have ventured on taking one so much above the common. However, she'll do for a time, no doubt, as she's fresh and shy ; as soon as I hear of her getting into bad company, she must go. It's against her, rather, her never having done anything of this kind before ; and yet it has its advantages, as she has no bad style to get out of. It just happens I was on the look-out for a hand, and you'll do," she went on, turning to Cecil. "Seven shillings a week is all you'll get at first, and you

must be here by eight o'clock every morning in Winter, and seven in Summer. Begin to-morrow, and let me see you're in time."

After this, both she and her niece seemed quite to forget the stranger's presence, and relapsed into their chatter about family affairs. At last, when Cecil was getting very tired, and almost dropping off to sleep with weariness, Mrs. Chatterton suddenly remembered she should be returning, and Mrs. Jones exclaimed loudly against herself for having wasted so much valuable time.

"To be sure," she added, "we're not so busy to-day as we are generally; there's nothing much going on this week; but still I oughtn't to have been out of the show-room so long. You'll come to-morrow."

And so they left, Mrs. Chatterton expatiating all the way home on her aunt's many good qualities, saying,

"You mustn't mind the little odd things like she says now and then; it's her way, and she doesn't mean no harm. She's a real good creature at bottom, and I can tell you it's a fine

thing for you to have got into that establishment. Some day, when you want to set up a shop for yourself, it'll be a great thing for you to put up, 'Late of Madame Mercy's.'"

Cecil smiled; the idea of her ever wanting to set up a shop seemed to her so wildly improbable that she could not help exclaiming—

"I don't think I shall ever try to do that. I shall be quite content if I can earn enough to keep myself as a work-girl. I have no ambition to rise any higher."

"Ah! so you think just now, dear, when you're in trouble; but it won't always be so. And I was just going to propose to you to board with me. I'm sure it would be much more comfortable than taking all your meals alone. You shall just pay me two or three shillings a week more, and I'll see that everything is nice for you before you go out, and your good dinner ready for you when you come in of an evening. I think they give you dinner there too, but maybe it will only be their nasty French fal-lals, so I'd rather see you eat a bit of good wholesome food with us—that's to

say," she added, hastily, "if you've no objection. Jim's at home always of an evening, and at breakfast too; only this morning he was off to his work before you came down. He's a master carpenter, is Jim—a very rising young man, as I hear everyone say; and he's always been a good son to his poor mother; so, if you don't mind sharing with us, I'll do for you, and welcome, as you're so young and lonely-like."

"Indeed I don't know how to thank you," the poor girl answered, at this unexpected kindness; for she felt it would indeed save her a great deal of trouble, as well as being pleasanter to one who had always lived surrounded by people, to have everything comfortable awaiting her when she came home tired at night, or was starting on a raw, dark Winter's morning.

"You'll have a long walk there every morning, and back every evening," went on the good old body, "and that's what troubles me most; for I daresay you won't be able to take the omnibus, except now and then perhaps of a wet day; and it's ill work for a girl like you to be walking the streets of London after dusk.

However, there's many a one has to do it; and if you look straight before you, and walk on ahead, most like no one will remark you. But here we are at home; and we'll take a bit of something for lunch. I always eats my dinner with Jim when he comes home of an evening."

Thus it was all settled satisfactorily; and Cecil, when she went to her little room that afternoon, for quiet and rest, as she was very tired, and the noise and bustle of the London streets had given her a headache, could not but feel that she had got over her difficulties much better than she had any right to expect. Here, in this retired nook of the busy capital of the world, she might drag out her days unnoticed and unmolested, even surrounded by friends she had once held dear, and who she believed had loved her also, without their for one moment suspecting that she whom they mourned as dead was alive, and not far from them. Then her thoughts reverted to the Irish town where she had left all those with whom she had been most intimate. Did they think her dead? That would depend on whether the hat she had

thrown into the river had been found, as she had intended it should be; if not, the search might still be going on, and eventually her traces might be discovered, she might be hunted up and forced to fly from her quiet resting-place. She prayed it might not be thus; but she had been told so many tales of the skill with which people now-a-days could be tracked and ferreted out, that her blood ran cold as she thought of Colonel Houston's ever discovering her in such a manner. What could he do to her, this man who had a legal claim to her? He could force her to come and live with him, she feared; and then she felt that it was in her to commit any crime, if, by so doing, she might avoid this fate. She shuddered as these thoughts came into her mind, and tried to turn to some other subject; but only dreadful or sorrowful ideas seemed present to her, and she could not but be glad to think that the next day would see her fully occupied, and so surrounded by bustling, busy scenes that she would have no time to dream over the past.

Then she went down again into Mrs. Chat-

terton's tidy little sitting-room, and listened to the good creature's tiresome twaddle until seven o'clock, when Mr. Jim made his appearance ; a few minutes after which a kind of high tea, comprising, on one table, the most prominent features of both tea and dinner, was set out. Jim was a tall, thick-set young man, looking very much like what he really was—a respectable artizan ; he had thick, curly, brown, dusty-looking hair, which he, on this first night of their acquaintance, had not thought it necessary to brush ; bold, frank-looking blue eyes, an intelligent forehead, and a beard and moustache, which were kept tolerably closely trimmed, covered the whole of the lower part of his face. He shook hands with Cecil in a shy, awkward manner, on his mother introducing her to his notice as “our new lodger, Miss Lacy, that I was telling you about yesterday, Jim.” But he seemed far too much overawed by her appearance to venture on addressing any remark to her ; even when his mother went out of the room, he followed her, as though afraid to be left alone with such a formidable personage ; and Cecil could hear

him say, "Why, mother, she's an out-and-out swell. What'll the likes of us do with such as her?"

"Well, indeed," answered his mother, with some alarm betrayed by her voice, "I didn't think you'd mind; and as the poor girl is an orphan, and all alone, I asked her to take her meals with us whilst she lives here. But, of course, if you don't like it, Jim, I'll make some excuse, and give her her bit in her own room."

"Oh! no, don't do that," replied the young fellow hastily. "It wouldn't be kind, and I daresay she's nice, though she is such a swell to look at."

As he finished speaking, they re-entered the room, and Cecil found it difficult to seem as though she knew nothing of what was going on. Tea was ready, however, and the move to the table prevented her confusion from appearing. When they were about half-way through the meal, Mrs. Chatterton suddenly exclaimed:

"Jim, do you see how like Miss Lacy is to that Miss Rideout we used to see in the park last year? She's thinner, her cheeks are more

hollow, and altogether she doesn't look as well ; but still it's very much the same face, and the hair is the very moral. I was telling Miss Lacy I saw the likeness, don't you?"

"That wasn't Miss Rideout," answered Jim, looking furtively in Cecil's direction, and seeing she had coloured brilliantly. "I went to Astley's on purpose to see her," he went on, "and she was nothing but a nasty yellow dried-up old hag, not a bit like the girl we saw in the Park. But you're right ; Miss Lacy resembles her enough almost to be the same."

"Only she told me she'd never been a horse-rider," replied Mrs. Chatterton ; whilst Cecil tried to preserve an unconcerned air, and go on with her dinner, and the young man thought to himself, "Whatever she said to mother, she's the same, and a sweetly pretty girl too ; though what she's on this lay for, is more than I can guess."

He was a good-hearted young fellow, and didn't say what he thought ; so that altogether the first evening passed off pretty well ; and when Cecil retired very early, on the

plea of having to be up betimes, she fancied she had made a very good arrangement, and one that promised well for her future comfort. There was no pretension about these people; they were content to be just what their station in life made them, and no more. With anyone who had been vulgarly upsetting and pretentious, no doubt the girl would have felt uncomfortable; but far below in social standing as these were to those with whom she had been accustomed to mix, there was yet an air of suitability to their position in everything they said and did, that glossed over the vulgarity and want of breeding, which, moreover, never shows so strongly in a truly good-hearted person as in one of a less amiable temper.

Next morning she was in the work-room by seven, the appointed time, and was soon busy learning her new duties, and doing such work as she was considered fit for. She found the long day over an uncongenial employment, without any out-of-door exercise, and shut up in close hot rooms, very tiring. Besides, the

companionship was unsuitable. None of the girls were of her own position—that of course she could not have expected; but there was more of a fast vulgarity about them than she had at all looked for, and her great beauty rendered her a mark for their ill-natured sneers.

“Why did you leave your last place?” was a constant question; and when she would reply that she had never been in any place before, they would answer, “Too much of a lady were you?—why didn’t you stick to that, and not come doing the grandee over us here, with your airs and your graces.”

To be sure, beyond scornful tosses of the head, they couldn’t do much during business hours; but, in revenge, at meal times their tongues went with redoubled vigour; and though Cecil’s haughty spirit so far bore her up that they had not the pleasure of seeing how their malicious remarks stung her, yet she suffered from them all the same, and found that though she had hidden herself from her old friends, and gained employment also, yet her troubles had not ceased; and she did not see

much chance of happiness, or even contentment, for her in her occupation.

As soon as business hours were over, which was about seven o'clock, except under special stress of work, she hurried on her things, and started homewards at the best pace her limbs could carry her. Then, indeed, she fully realized the kindness of Mrs. Chatterton's arrangement, when she came in weary and jaded, to find a comfortable meal in a tidy room, with good-natured friends waiting for her. She had met with nothing but trouble and annoyances all day, and the change to these kind faces struck her so forcibly that she would have liked to lay her head on the good landlady's shoulder, and weep for very relief to find herself there again; but that might have astonished and alarmed her friend, who thought she should be in the seventh heaven of happiness at having obtained admission into Madame Mercier's workrooms.

Therefore she tried to be very merry, and laugh at her ignorance, and the mistakes she had made that day, taking care to tell also how

Mrs. Jones had once or twice stopped to speak to her, and said her style of working was neat, and she would soon do very well.

"I told you Aunt Anne was a kind body," answered Mrs. Chatterton, triumphantly; "though she did take you rather short at first;" whilst Jim looked on with astonishment at the idea of this swell, who he was confident was identical with the lady in the Row, being a workwoman in a milliner's establishment.

Thus the time rolled by slowly, the work-room always irksome to Cecil, on account of the disagreeable companionship, the life of confinement and toil telling slowly but surely on her constitution. She became more transparent and fairy-like day by day, which her good landlady remarked, and her son also, he saying, one night, towards the beginning of October, after the girl had left the room,

"What's wrong with Miss Lacy, mother? What secret is there about her? She's fretting, too, though she tries to hide it; and no wonder, for she's not been used to work, that's certain."

"I wish I knew what troubled her," the

good woman answered; "for I've grown as fond of her as if she was my own daughter. She's a dear sweet creature, though so downhearted; and I saw Aunt Anne the other day, when she told me she'd not had as good a girl in the work-room this many a long year. 'She's the neatest, quietest, silentest girl I've ever had,' she said; 'and one of the cleverest, too, and if you know any young man looking out for a wife, you may tell him I said that of her.' There's her words, Jim, and they're good said of anyone, be she who she may. I think she brought me luck, too," she added, "and that the house has got on better since; at least, there's no doubt she's a pleasant companion to have for a bit every day. She do know a'most everybody and everything, till the more I sees of her, the more I wonders how her friends—for in course she must have friends—came to let her go."

It had now begun to close in dark early in the evenings, and about the time when she was going home it was generally quite dusk. Sometimes, also, the days were very wet and dis-

agreeable; but still she took her long walk bravely, only wrapping herself up in a large shawl of Mrs. Chatterton's when the weather was unusually bad.

"Which it so spoils your pretty little figure, dear, anyone would think you were a dowdy old woman," remarked her friend one evening, as she came into the sitting-room with it on.

"All the better for me," she answered, gaily. "I sometimes feel almost nervous when walking home late now, never having been accustomed to be out at that hour in a city before. But I'm glad to say I've not met with any rudeness hitherto."

And then she went to take off her wet things, and coming back to the blazing fire, and pleasant, homely meal, chatted away freely, as she had learnt to do with her kind friends, making the tea-table very cheerful to them, in return for all they did for her.

Next evening, when she set out in the dusk to pursue her homeward way, before she had gone many steps down the street, a man, whom at first she did not recognize, stepped up to her,

and she was just beginning to feel alarmed, when the well-known friendly voice of Jim Chatterton said, a little nervously,

“I heard you complaining of being frightened, walking home alone, Miss Lacy, so I thought I’d just wait for you about here, and walk with you, if you’ve no objection.”

Now, if she had been consulted she would just as soon he had dispensed with this piece of attention; but, as it was, he seemed so anxious to please, and so fearful of giving offence, that she could only smile and thank him; adding, however,

“I am sorry to keep you out so late. I hope you won’t mind my fears, as I see they are groundless, and I couldn’t think of giving you this long walk again.”

He made no answer to this, but was very agreeable on the way home—agreeable after his fashion, and as he knew best how to be, poor fellow; for if Cecil had attempted to compare him for one minute with the gentlemen with whom she had formerly associated, either in manners, appearance, or conversation, of course

such a comparison could not but have been to his disadvantage. It would, moreover, have been unfair; for, to do him justice, he never tried to appear more than he really was—a simple, kind-hearted, upright man, of the artizan class, who had no higher ambition than to make a good name in his trade, so that he might afford, when he married, to keep his wife comfortably.

His wife. Yes, that was the worst of it. Until lately his affections had strayed, in a wild uncertain way, to the daughter of a struggling greengrocer hard by. Since Cecil's appearance, however, he had first wavered in his allegiance, and then rapidly deserted it, contenting himself for some time with adoring in secret this bright particular star that had so suddenly enlightened the maternal home with its radiance.

And then when she (his mother) expressed in such decided terms her feelings towards this stranger, saying that she loved her as a daughter, and repeated so pointedly Mrs. Jones's remarkable words, it was not wonderful that his

heart, long silently set in that direction, should receive an impetus which led him to determine, if Miss Lacy could be won over, he would make her his wife.

He could not but feel that she was immeasurably above him ; but circumstances had thrown her into their position in life, without any friends on whom she could rely for assistance—nay, more, all the small livelihood she managed to earn she had got into the way of obtaining through his mother's help ; therefore it was not so wild a dream, after all, to imagine she would be willing to gain a comfortable home by marrying one who loved her with all his heart. For he told himself constantly that he did so. She was so sweet, so gentle, so exquisitely lovely, with the pale pure loveliness of an angel, lightened up in her few gay moods with the piquant merry look of a mortal loving and loveable woman, that the only wonder was, he had not lost his head and told her his mind many times before now. But his passion grew stronger day by day, till he felt that this could not long go on, and she remain in

ignorance of it. Fortunately, he had his mother's full approval, he was sure, and hers he must win; one so friendless could not be hard-hearted, though he could not help remembering his inferiority painfully whenever he considered the matter.

At length he resolved to tell his mother all he felt, getting her to sound the girl's mind on the subject; and during this time, whilst he had been turning and twisting the matter over in his thoughts, he waited for her every evening at Madame Mercier's door, that he might escort her home.

This at first was especially distasteful to her; she seemed somehow to foresee that trouble would come of it, and hinted again and again she would rather be alone; but as time wore on, and she perceived no change in his manner, nor any attempt at familiarity, her fears died away, and she became accustomed to look for him as her natural attendant, and would have missed him greatly had he not appeared at the usual place every evening.

It was late in the year, well on towards

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Christmas, when he confided his love, his doubts, and fears to his mother, and she signified her approval warmly ; at the same time declining to do any of the business herself.

“Young people always manage those affairs best between themselves,” she would say, “and you can’t expect me to interfere in any way about it, the more because she might think she had to do it, poor thing ! because I’d been good-natured, and given her a little lift when she first started in London life. No, my boy, ask her like a man yourself ; she’s not a bit upsetting, for all she’s a real lady, so you needn’t be afraid of her turning on you.”

“Well, I’ll try, mother,” he answered, “though I’m a’most afraid I’ll never have the courage.”

Circumstances favoured him, however, and he got the opportunity of saying all he wanted to say, sooner than he had expected.

CHAPTER VIII.

CECIL MEETS A FRIEND.

THE very next night after his conversation with his mother, as Cecil and he were walking home together, she began—

“I’m so afraid you’ll think me rude and unkind, yet I must ask you to do something for me—or rather, not to do something you have been in the habit of doing. I mean, I want you not to come for me every evening; and it isn’t because I’m not very glad of your protection. I say this, for I am; and it’s been a great help to me, getting me accustomed to walk the streets by night; but the girls in the work-room have found it out, and they make unkind remarks about it, that will, if continued, very likely cause me to be turned out of employ-

ment. I needn't tell you what a loss that would be to me. I am sure you can well understand it, so don't think hardly of me when I beg you to cease coming for me."

Jim's brow grew dark and clouded over; she could see that in the lamp-light, as he answered—

"You don't mean to say those girls dare to speak badly of you for this! But never mind them," he went on, earnestly; "why should you continue to toil and strive for your daily bread? I know you are as far above me as the Queen is on her throne, but if the honest love of a poor working-man is worth taking, I offer it to you, only daring to tell you the greatest happiness I could ever attain, would be your acceptance of it."

"Oh, Jim!" she cried, unguardedly and greatly distressed, "you, too! Where will this all end—must I be driven from every hiding-place? I thank you for your offer," she went on, more calmly, "and I take it as it was meant, in all kindness, but I cannot accept it. Pray do not think of this again; it can never be

as you wish, and will pain us both to urge it."

"Nay," he said, stoutly, "there would be no pain could I hope to win, no matter how long the hope might be deferred. But you said just now, 'You, too;' there must be then some other; tell me who or where he is. It is some of the friends of your former life, I guess well; but why then have you left them, if you ever cared for them?"

"My poor friend," she replied, "you say you love me, and you would fain hope. I warn you, hope is hopeless in this case, and therefore I will tell you to what I alluded when I said 'You, too.' I have cut myself off from my former life; I have become as one dead to my former friends, because amongst them was one who loved me, and who would persist when I told him hope was vain. I tell you this, that you may see how utterly useless it is to expect I may change, when I have said I cannot love. Spare me, and do not question me further, it only calls up painful memories and scenes I would wish forgotten for ever."

"Poor fellow! I can feel for him," muttered

No sooner said than done; and in a few minutes poor Cecil became aware that she was being followed by these two tipsy youngsters, who gained on her with every step. She walked onwards as fast as she could, in the vain endeavour to shake them off, or show them, at least, she was a person whose business was pressing, and not one of the street loiterers they had supposed her to be. But her exertions were to no purpose; they had taken just enough spirits to render them audacious and insolent, and not enough to disable them from walking. Still they followed her, whilst she almost flew onwards; not daring to run, fearful that they might do so also, in which case they would certainly overtake and catch her.

In the meantime, bewildered by fear, she forgot to look where she was going, and before long found that she had lost her way, and was in a part of London with which she was not very familiar. She was, in truth, near Grosvenor Square; but she had hardly recognised the fact that she was in a strange locality, when one of her pursuers, thinking it time to

put an end to the chase, stepped forward quickly, and attempted to put his arm round her waist. With a stifled cry, she slipped from him, and fled with the swiftness of a deer, followed by her tormentors, laughing loudly, as they marked her evident terror.

"By Jove! the girl has wings!" cried one of them, as she darted round a corner, and disappeared from their sight. They followed as fast as they could, but when they turned the angle she was nowhere to be seen. On each side of the street, stretching in front of them, were large, gloomy-looking houses, as the residences of the aristocracy in London so often are.

At the door of one of these houses a carriage was standing, the footman of which was holding the door open for a lady to enter. This lady, it was evident from her dress, concealed, as it was, under an ample opera-cloak of white fur, was going out for the evening; and as the two men drew near, she stepped into the carriage, the footman slammed to the door, sprang to his seat, and the carriage drove on.

The poor girl's pursuers were baffled; there

was no trace of her to be discovered high or low, and, greatly disgusted at having taken so much trouble for nothing, they turned their steps homeward.

In the meantime Cecil, closely followed by the two tipsy youths, had, on doubling the corner, perceived the carriage close before her. The door was a little open, and the footman was at the house door, with his back towards her, drawing his mistress's flowing cloak round her skirts, as she stepped out into the damp, misty air, whilst with the other hand he held an umbrella over her beautifully-dressed head. All this Cecil's excited mind took in in a moment, and quick as light a plan was formed in her terrified brain, which she put into execution as soon as formed. Her pursuers were not yet in sight. With the quick, soft step of a cat, she sprang into the carriage, hardly shaking its exquisitely-balanced springs—at any rate, not enough to warn the stolid coachman any intruder was there. There she crouched down into a corner of the roomy vehicle, well in the shadow, and waited to hear her tormentors go by.

But that on which she had not calculated happened—the lady came down to her carriage before the men passed. Fortunately Cecil's dress was black, and, huddled up in a corner as she was, she escaped observation. The lady stepped in without remarking anything, apparently; while Cecil remained where she was, not venturing to breathe, for fear of attracting observation. How she should get out, and find her way home, was what now puzzled the unfortunate girl. She had not an idea of her road from that place to the quarter where she lived, and also she could never hope to escape without attracting attention either from the footman or the coachman. Suddenly her reflections were interrupted by a quiet, soft voice saying,

“I know you are there, girl. I saw you get into the carriage as I was coming out of my house just now. Those men were molesting you, I suppose? I could see you were afraid of something from the way you looked back, and so allowed you to remain. Now, sit up, and tell me all about it.”

Cecil started, and took a seat, as she was told; more because, as it seemed to her, she must obey, than from any wish to come prominently into view. She then related, as she had been told to do, what had happened, and how she was nearly exhausted from fatigue and terror, when the sight of the open carriage door providentially gave her a way of escape.

"And what are you? And why are you out so late?" demanded the lady again. "You are young, well-born, and educated, from your voice, I can tell. How, then, do you come to be wandering through the streets alone at night?"

"I am a workwoman in Madame Mercier's establishment," she answered; "and cannot go home before work-hours are over."

"But you cannot always have followed that business?" her interlocutor asked. "Your manner and accent are quite superior to that of such a class generally. You must have been driven to it by distress."

"Distress!" answered Cecil, sadly. "Yes, such as you will never feel, I pray, for your kindness to me this night. I have indeed seen

better times, but they are past and gone now, never to come again. These are useless memories; and, lady, I will not intrude my conversation on you any further, if you will tell me whither you are going, that I may have some idea where I shall turn when I leave the carriage; for, in truth, I don't know London well, and I lost my way when I got frightened this evening."

"I am going to Lady A——'s, in Grosvenor Square. But I'll tell you what I'll do. You seem an honest good girl, and one that has seen better days, so I'll send the carriage back with you as far as your home. Tell me where it is, and I will direct the servants to drive there. Don't think I would do this for every one; but you interest me—your voice reminds me of some one, and I cannot think who the person is. Stay, here we are at the house where I must get out. Tell me where you live?"

"No, indeed, lady," answered Cecil, stepping out after her, "I cannot allow you to do this for me; though I am very grateful for your kindness."

* Something in the tone of her voice caused the lady to turn and look at her, as she stood there under the full glare of a lamp close by; and as they thus faced each other under the brilliant light, a sudden recognition dawned on both their countenances.

“Miss Leveston, is that really you?” cried the kind lady, who was none other than the Marchioness of Lenington, formerly the Lady Edythe Vavasour. “Wait a minute!” she cried, as Cecil would have turned and fled, overcome with terror at this unlooked-for meeting; “you must go back in the carriage—I insist on it now I know who you are. I cannot disappoint these friends with whom I am engaged to dine, or I would return with you; but you must come and see me to-morrow, in the evening—I shan’t be going out; and if you don’t come about this time, I’ll send for you. Thomas, take this young lady wherever she tells you, and remember the address for me, as I may want to know it.” So saying, she signed Cecil again into the carriage, and vanished into the house.

When she arrived at Mrs. Chatterton’s door,

she found that good woman looking out for her, in a great state of alarm, and sufficiently astonished to see her young friend return in a carriage and pair.

"Whatever can she have been about?" she thought, as she ran to open the door, anxious to arrive before Polly the maid, and perform that office, that she might have an opportunity of inspecting the turn-out more closely. Not a word did she speak, however, until the door was close shut on the magnificent apparition that had so much startled her; and then she managed to gasp out,

"Have they found you out at last? I always knew you belonged to great people, which, now they've got you again, we'll see no more of you."

"Don't think so badly of me as that, Mrs. Chatterton. The lady who sent me home to night, I did know slightly, once on a time, and this evening we met by an accident, about which I will tell you by-and-by."

Over the tea-table she told them of her fright, her escape, and the recognition that had followed; whilst Jim ground his teeth with rage, to

think he had not been there to take summary vengeance on the insolent fellows who had dared to insult her. The lady's kindness, however, touched them all.

"She is one of the right sort," said the landlady. "You shall go to her, and welcome, to-morrow night, my pretty dear. Don't come home here, but go on straight from Madame Mercy's. Jim here shall wait for you, and take you on; for you see well you won't always get off so handy as you did to-night."

And thus it was arranged, in spite of Cecil's entreaties that James should not be sent to escort her, she fearing a repetition of what had occurred before. He divined her fears, and said, with a sad smile,

"Don't be afraid—nothing shall annoy you."

Thus she, seeing his meaning, was obliged to accept his protection, and rest satisfied.

Accordingly, on leaving the work-room next evening, she found Jim waiting for her, and together they proceeded along the road she had gone over in such terror the night before. When they reached the house, James stopped and said,

"How will you get home? Will they send you, do you think?"

"Oh! no, I hope not," cried Cecil, frightened at the idea of taking out that dignified-looking footman and coachman for her convenience. She had grown very humble about those things latterly. There was a time when such a thought would have seemed to her perfectly natural.

"Then I'll come for you in two hours' time," James went on, "and wait about here. It will then be nine o'clock. I'll not ask for you at the house, but I'll stop near, and you may know any time after then you like to leave I'll be waiting for you."

"A thousand thanks," was all she could utter, at this fresh proof of the devotion she so much regretted, and which she could never return. A minute or two more, and she was in the Marchioness of Lenington's boudoir, where none but her most intimate friends ever obtained admission. Her ladyship was alone as Cecil entered, and, rising, she came forward, kissed the timid, shrinking girl, led her to a seat, and whilst she took off her hat and coat

with her own white hands, tried in every way to re-assure her old rival, and prove to her that she still looked on her as an equal, and not as Madame Mercier's workwoman.

"But I heard you were drowned," she went on, after a minute or two spent in making her comfortable. "I heard all about it, indeed," she continued. "Let me speak openly with you—we shall understand each other so much better. I was told how you had been forced to marry Colonel Houston—the man I loved once, do you remember?" she added, with a half-smile. "Ah! I hope I have lived that down; at least, all the passion and bitterness of it, all the good that is to be got out of such a love, I trust, remains. And then I heard of the trouble that fell on you, and after that of your sudden disappearance—your death by drowning, in fact, for so it was supposed to be. Tell me how was it such an idea got abroad? Had you arranged that it should?"

Cecil bowed her head.

"It was the only way," she said, "to avoid him; and I could not have lived with him."

Then the beautiful and stately mistress of this magnificent mansion came over and knelt beside the poor work-girl, passing her hand round her waist, and drawing her towards her as she did so.

“Was it because of me you acted thus?” she asked. “If so, I thank you from my heart for your remembrance of my petition. But the time was past then. You should not have let it influence you. I was to blame ever to ask it.”

“Don’t blame yourself, Lady Lenington,” answered the girl, earnestly. “Had you never spoken to me on the subject, I could not have married Colonel Houston willingly; and having married him under compulsion, I could not live with him. If the act was blameworthy, I alone am guilty.”

“My dear girl,” answered Lady Lenington, gently, “let me speak to you as I would to a sister—a younger sister, who wanted my advice; and I am not going to read you a lecture without knowing of what I speak. You know that I too was forced into a marriage I abhorred; and at first, when I saw that it was

a fate I could not escape from, and that the man I loved was false to me, I nearly broke my heart with fretting and grief. I could have killed myself then, but that I was a coward, and was afraid of what must come hereafter. So I wore myself out in ceaseless repinings, until the day arrived and all was over. Then it seemed to me suddenly, as a revelation from heaven, that it would be nobler and better, now the deed was done, to bear it as a woman should, bravely and truly, letting none see that the yoke rankled, that the bondage was heavy; to do my duty with a true heart, bravely, because it was my duty, and the end for which I had been called into this life. I did not care for my husband; I may say so now, for that is all past—nay, more, he was repugnant to me; but he loved me foolishly, as old men often will, and showered upon me with a lavish hand everything that the heart could desire or the eye crave—pleased when he succeeded in pleasing me, disappointed if he did not. Surely devotion such as this required that at least I should seem happy; but for a time the struggle was hard.

I did try it, though, and after a while it became pleasanter and easier. It was sweet to see that one, at least, in the world turned to me in his joys, that my smile might enhance them ; in his anxieties and annoyances, that my presence might soothe them. Yes, I, who had married, not loving my husband, and even with the image of another stamped upon my heart, found that my endeavour to do what was right was blessed to me, as right always is ; and I became a happy woman, with a dark spot, no doubt, deep down in the history of my life, of which Lenington knows also. I would not keep it a secret from him, though I feared it might estrange him. But he only told me he had suspected it long ago, and it gave him still more confidence in me that I had dared to tell him all. So the poison is drawn out of that wound now, and I can enjoy life as once I never thought I should again. Oh ! my child, I have told you this to show how much wiser and better it would have been to meet your fate boldly than to shirk it as you have done. Think better of it, dear. Let me write to your husband

and explain it all. You will be so much happier, if you will make up your mind to do your duty by him as you ought."

But Cecil drew herself away from Lady Lenington's encircling arm, shuddering.

"I couldn't," she cried despairingly—"I couldn't. For the sake of our old friendship, and the request that you once made me, don't tell any one that I am alive. I go now by the name of Miss Lacy. Call me that, and forget that such a girl as Cecil Leveston ever lived. No doubt you are right in what you say, and that the sacrifice of all your inclinations was noble, and has been followed by a blessing; but I have not the strength to act thus—I am a poor weak creature, and the will I once had has been crushed out of me by sorrow. Besides, your case is not like mine. The man you loved was not accused of a crime, convicted, and sent to die in a foreign land, far from all that made life dear to him; and his accuser and persecutor, who, in point of fact, was his murderer, though he did not deal his death-blow—this man, I say, was not the man you were compelled to marry.

Did I call myself poor and weak?—did I say I had no strength to do my duty? I mistook then. What I meant was that I hold it my duty never to grant word or sign of love to the man who hunted Gerald Anstruther to his death; and while I have life I will have strength to do what is right, as I have conceived it. Now promise me you will keep my secret.”

“I will,” answered her friend, simply yet sadly. “I see your case is different, and will press you no more. Let us talk of something else. I will ring for tea. I thought that would be more comfortable than going down to a stiff dinner, so I told Lenington he might take his alone, or go to the club, or do anything he liked, and join us afterwards, as I want you to see him.”

Tea was brought, and they took it cosily over the bright fire, in that luxuriously-furnished little room, whilst they chatted over days long past, and merry scenes in which they had been together.

“And Mr. Villars of your regiment, who used to be a great friend of yours, I remem-

ber," asked Lady Lenington, "what of him? Is he still as merry and wild as ever? Do you recollect the night he wore Miss Baxter's shoes at the Exhibition Palace?"

"Oh! he's much quieter now, or he was when I left," answered Cecil. "He was married, you know, to such a pretty girl; they were so kind to me. I often think of them, and only that I wish to remain dead to all my old friends, I should like so much to see them."

"But now," began Lady Lenington, when the tea-things were removed, "I want to talk to you about something seriously. No, don't be afraid," she added, "I won't say another word on that subject, as I cannot help feeling your case is very strong. But it is a thing I want you to do for me. You see I live a very lonely life here; it's true I could have as many people about me always as I like, and Robert is good company, but then he's out often. Maud comes to me, too, sometimes, but I'd like to have a friend living with me, on whose society I could count at all times. I have long been thinking I would like to get a

companion, only I knew no one who would care to come, that I would also have cared to have. As I should like a friend, and not a menial, I want somebody who will sit and chat with me by the hour together, when I am in a talking humour; who will learn new fancy work with me, and who, when I am in a reading humour, will sit down quietly beside me and read, too, without feeling I am being rude in taking up a book in her presence. I have no dogs to be washed and combed, no mysteries to be ferreted out and published abroad, no dresses to turn and line that my maid can't do for me if I want them done, so that isn't the kind of person I require. What I want to ask you is this: will you have pity upon me, and take upon yourself the task of amusing me and keeping me company? Don't speak, I see your face forming a 'no.' I demand, as my right, that due consideration should be given to this request. You shall have your own suite of rooms; you shall have your meals with us when you like, and, when you like, you shall have them in your own apartments. You shall

come out to ride or drive with me when you like, and when you like you shall stay at home. You shall go out with me into society when you wish, and when you don't feel inclined you needn't; for though I want your companionship I shall introduce you as a friend of mine staying with me. Everything shall be just as you like, except that unless, in case of trouble or illness, I should insist on your taking a cup of tea with me every evening before dinner, and chatting over the events of the day. Say yes, there's a dear."

"But I cannot," answered Cecil, mournfully. "You are too good, and it would be far too pleasant and nice for me; but there are obstacles to it that cannot be overcome. In the first place, sooner or later I should meet some of those who had known me in my earlier days; then all would be discovered, and what would become of me? Besides all that, which, in itself, makes accepting your kind offer impossible, I could not leave those poor Chattertons, who have been so good to me, the minute I got something better to do."

"Who are they?" asked Lady Lenington, quickly; "tell me all about them."

So she told her all: of Mrs. Chatterton's kindness, of the employment she had procured for her, and then suddenly remembering Jim, she cried, starting up and looking at the clock on the mantelpiece,

"Why, it's half-past nine already; James Chatterton will be waiting for me, and I must go."

"Nonsense," said her friend, holding her down, firmly; "you shan't go till you have answered a few more questions. Who is James Chatterton, and what does he mean by waiting for you? You are going home in the carriage."

"He's Mrs. Chatterton's son," replied Cecil, firmly; "and I don't think I ought to go home in the carriage, after he has taken the trouble to come out for me."

"Is he a young or an old man?" went on her ladyship, without heeding this protest.

"A young man," the girl replied.

"Oh! then, it's very good for him," answered

Lady Lenington; "and I should think your common-sense ought to tell you that the sooner you cease living on terms of equality with Mr. James Chatterton, the better it will be for his peace of mind."

"I am afraid so," said Cecil sadly, with a feeling of conscious guilt; "still, this once it can do no harm to walk back with him, as he has come out so far."

"Answer me plainly," cried her friend, looking the girl fixedly in the face. "Do you care for this man? I have heard of such things happening, and though I shouldn't have thought it of you, yet one never knows. Tell me, do you like him?"

"I like him very much indeed as a friend," answered Cecil, returning Lady Lenington's gaze firmly, "but in the way you mean not at all. I tell you my heart is dead to all love but that of one man, whose bones lie far away in the Australian wilderness. Does that satisfy you?"

"Amply; and now we'll settle Mr. Chatterton."

So saying, her ladyship went to the window, and drawing aside the curtain, looked out. There, at a little distance from them, leaning against a lamp-post, stood the figure of a man. Lady Lenington pushed up the window; the noise of its opening attracted his attention, and looking in that direction, he perceived a lady standing, as it were, in a frame of light, and beckoning to him. He went over, and a strange voice said softly,

“Mr. Chatterton, is that you?”

“It is, ma’am,” he answered.

“I only wanted to tell you,” went on the voice, “that Miss Lacy will go home in the carriage in about an hour’s time. I feared you might be waiting, and thought it better to let you know.”

After this he went home to his mother very down-hearted, and said,

“They’ve got her now, mother, and they won’t let her go again, you may depend; she’ll return to her own sort, as I suppose it’s natural she should.”

“Of course she will,” answered his mother

briskly; "and right glad I shall be to see her get her own again. She was too good for the likes of us, that's a fact, though she did take up with us wonderful. She'd be better, however, with her own people; and all I'd ask of her would be that she shouldn't forget us quite."

In the meantime, Lady Lenington could see that, if Mrs. Chatterton seconded the proposal, Cecil could easily be transferred to her, as leaving the good woman was the girl's chief objection to taking the place the Marchioness offered, and her ladyship resolved to take measures accordingly.

CHAPTER IX.

AMONG THE FLOWERS.

NOTHING more was said between Cecil and her friend that evening as to the place the Marchioness wished her to take, and at a tolerably late hour she was sent home.

Next day, however, when Cecil was away at Madame Mercier's, and Jim was out, Mrs. Chatterton was considerably flustered at seeing a carriage drive up to her door. No doubt it might have come to one of her lodgers; but they were not usually carriage people, and boasted no friends among such, therefore the landlady felt instinctively it must be some one after Miss Lacy, and the girl was out. Her perturbation did not decrease when she was asked for, and not Miss Lacy, as she had ima-

gined. She passed her hands over her hair to assure herself that it was tidy, pulled off her housekeeper's apron, and made her way to her little sitting-room "that upset that you might have knocked her down with a feather," as she told Cecil afterwards.

When she entered the room, the visitor was already in possession, and her tall, stately person and rich flowing skirts seemed to fill and pervade every inch of the apartment, as she rose, and holding out her hand, said,

"Miss Lacy's kind friend, Mrs. Chatterton, I presume? I am come to thank you for all your goodness to her. Allow me to introduce myself. I am the Marchioness of Lenington, of whom you may have heard her speak; she had tea with me last night, as you know."

All this was said in such a friendly, cordial manner that, nervous as Mrs. Chatterton had been, she could not help presently feeling at her ease, and answered, with some of her usual vivacity,

"Indeed, I'm glad the poor child has met with some of her own proper friends, my lady;

for, you see, she's too good for the likes of us, no matter how we love her, or how we try to make her comfortable. I can't help thinking it's a pity she should be wasting her life with a humdrum old woman like me, when, if she was with her own people, she'd be courted and married by some nice young gentleman, most like ; for she's a good girl, and that's better than being pretty alone, as I tell her, which it's a device of Satan."

Lady Lenington looked at the lively bustling little woman before her, and could not restrain a smile as she pronounced this remarkable opinion, then she asked,

"And do you get my friend little Cecil to coincide with you in your idea that beauty is a snare of the Evil One?"

"Well, I can't say exactly ; the poor child's down in her spirits, and frets a good deal, so that she don't often talk gay and pleasant like, as your ladyship does ; but then, you don't know what trouble is, I daresay."

"We all know plenty about that," answered her visitor with a sigh, "though I daresay

many know more about it than I." Then, seeing the little woman was too overawed to be easily drawn out, she went on, "I came here to-day, however, for the special purpose of asking you, don't you think it would be much better and fitter Miss Lacy should return to her own friends and position in life? I want her to come and live with me as my companion and friend; but she seems unwilling to do so, because she doesn't think she ought to leave you, who have been kind to her. I cannot persuade her to see that she need in no way forsake you, in returning to her former station; but I think if you were to speak to her, and tell her such is your desire, she would consent; and I am sure, after a little time, would be glad she had done so. She would be free to come and spend the day with you whenever she liked; and you, I know, would be pleased to see her occupying the position to which she was born."

"I agree with your ladyship," answered good Mrs. Chatterton. "Of course I don't mean to say I shan't be very sorry—sorrier than I can tell you," she added, the tears gathering in her

eyes ; "but from the minute I knew she had friends still living, I have thought that she ought to return to them. It's not fit that she should be working the life out of herself all day in them millinery rooms, and walking home late at night, just all the same as a common needle-woman. Right glad I'll be to see her any time I come across her, but I won't keep her from her friends an hour longer than she wishes ; and I daresay I'll be able to persuade her to go, when I speak to her about it."

"I knew you'd see it in that light," said the Marchioness ; "from what she told me, I knew you must be a sensible woman, as well as a kind-hearted one. So now I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll drive over to Madame Mercier's and bring her back here. You shall speak to her, and if you fail to persuade her I'll add my entreaties. Then I'll wait for her to put up her things, and take her away with me."

"Very well, your ladyship, I shall expect you both back soon," answered the landlady, waiting on her visitor to the door. Then the Marchioness stepped into the carriage and drove

away, smiling kindly back on the poor woman, as she stood watching her off.

Cecil was summoned from the workroom, and, to Mrs. Jones' astonishment, was greeted in the most affectionate manner by the great lady; for the forewoman knew Lady Lenington well, and was always pleased to receive an order from her.

"Run and put on your hat and coat," said her friend to Cecil; "you are coming with me, and I will settle it all with Mrs. Jones whilst you are away."

As soon as she was gone the lady turned to the forewoman and said,

"She won't come back here if I can help it. Tell me, is there anything owing to the house for taking her away; if so, put it down in the bill."

"Oh, nothing at all, your ladyship. She is a nice young lady, though I'm sure I never thought your ladyship knew her, or you should have seen her before."

"I'm sure I wish I had," answered the Marchioness; "but here she is. Come, Cecil, I

want to get home before lunch. Good morning, Mrs. Jones ;" and so saying, she sallied out of the room, followed by Cecil, who stopped one moment as she was leaving, to say farewell to Mrs. Jones, and thank her for her kindness, she seeing plainly that she was being taken away from the work-room for ever, without her own consent being asked. Not that she really cared to exert her will and refuse here ; it seemed to her now that she could only will on one matter, and that all other things were indifferent to her. She would, let those around her govern her completely on all but that one point.

After a little talking over and persuasion from Mrs. Chatterton, it was all settled—she was to remain one night longer in the humble yet kind and comfortable home where she had passed so many months ; then, next day, Lady Lenington would call for and carry her and her few effects off to the house in Grosvenor Place, which, for the future, she was to look upon as her home. Jim was very downcast when he heard this arrangement on his return ; and, as he bade her good night, said,

"Good-bye also, as I shall be off before you are up to-morrow; and it is very likely we may never meet again. Forgive my presumption in having once dared to raise my hopes so high; and remember, if ever your new old friends get tired of you, we are not, but shall be always willing to receive you."

"Good-bye," she answered, more gaily than she had spoken for some time, for truly the idea of the life which she was entering upon was more pleasant to her than the toilsome one she had been leading lately. "You have not seen the last of me yet. I shall be here with you often again; and I hope some day to be able to show how grateful I feel for your kindness."

Next day she was carried off, and began her duties as companion that evening, in a long and chatty tête-à-tête with her ladyship before dinner, during the course of which the Marchioness said,

"And now, Cecil, as you have consented to be my friend, *confidante*, and companion, to amuse me when I am dull, to scold me when I do wrong, and to get me out of scrapes when I

get into them, I want to tell you that I must offer you some pecuniary recompense for all those services. I didn't speak of this before, because it is an understood thing with all companions; and I didn't wish you to feel the chain of your bondage too soon, for fear you might draw back; but as that is settled, you must take the position fully, and allow me to pay you what I would to any companion or governess whose services I engaged in the regular way. I'll pay you the first half in advance, so that you may get anything you want; and as I knew you would have nothing of the kind, I took the liberty of getting one or two evening dresses for you, which I hope you'll accept as a present from me. Don't say a word, dear," she went on, kissing her friend as she tried to utter some thanks. "The only good money is to me is to try and make those to whom I take a fancy happy; so please let me amuse myself in my own way. And remember I am always delighted to have you with me everywhere—you are a friend of mine, stopping with me; but if you are afraid to go out for

fear of being recognised, never think yourself bound to accompany me. We dine at home this evening, as we are only stopping a few days in town, on our way through. In a week or two we go down to Northamptonshire. Lenington keeps a famous stud there; and you shall have as much riding as you like. Now, let's go and dress for dinner. I hear the gong."

"You are too good to me," gasped Cecil.
"How can I ever thank you enough?"

"Well, if you really wish to show your gratitude in a very marked manner, call me Edythe, and I shall really be obliged. You see, I call you Cecil in the most unceremonious way; and I don't like the freedom to be all on one side."

At dinner Cecil was introduced to the Marquis—or, rather, before dinner, and he took her down. Lady Lenington had introduced her as Miss Lacy; but she said to Cecil before,

"You know, I told him all about you, because I couldn't have a secret from him; and he is honour itself, so you needn't be afraid of his betraying you."

And certainly by his manner, though she knew he had heard all about her, it would have been impossible to guess he was acquainted with her previous history.

Cecil's life was very pleasant and prosperous now, if she could only forget all the dark days that were gone. She could be alone, or she could have the society of those who liked her and cared for her; and now and then she would hear little pieces of news about those she still thought of and loved. Before leaving for Northamptonshire, she had paid a farewell visit to Mrs. Chatterton, promising that good lady should be the first person she would visit on her return to town. And then they left, and she was in the country again—in the country, in the bright crisp Christmas weather; and she felt she could be so happy if only she could forget. But that was impossible; and, besides, she was for ever haunted by the fear that some of her old friends, less thoughtful and kind-hearted than Edythe Lenington, would turn up—then what would become of her? She perpetually compared herself to a man who had

built a house on the side of a volcano, and knew not what day the ground might open and overwhelm him. Thus the time passed on; the Spring was approaching, and she had begun to get accustomed to her new position; and having hitherto avoided detection, hoped to do so to the end.

That expectation was vain; and she might have known it was so, but she had grown to feel safe, and when the discovery she dreaded came at last, it came at least unexpectedly.

It happened thus. Lady Lenington went out to drive one fine morning near the end of February. Cecil had been out with the hounds the day before. She was one of the best mounted and most daring riders out, and being tired, had chosen to stay at home that morning, whilst the Marchioness went to pay her visits alone. After a time Cecil went into the green-house, pulled a magnificent bouquet of flowers, and returned with her lap full of them to the drawing-room, with the intention of arranging them in some vases she had previously filled with water for their reception. She was singing as she

entered the room, and walked towards a table in the centre window, where she intended to put down her burden. As she advanced humming a tune, and wholly occupied with her flowers, she never perceived a stranger standing back behind the heavy window-curtains, and gazing at her with a white, horror-struck face.

Suddenly she looked up with the feeling she was being watched; and at the expression of terrified and pained recognition that overspread her countenance, Colonel Houston—for it was he—cried, in a hoarse, broken voice,

“My God! have the waters given up their dead?”

Stepping forward, his dark face working with contending emotions, he seized her hands, scattering the flowers about her in all directions, and drew her towards him, holding her shrinking figure to his heart for a few minutes, scanning her downcast face with eager, passionate eyes as he did so. Then he spoke, and his voice was full of agonized feeling as he cried,

“How could you do it? How could you have

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"I hope you did not think of me," in answer
of course, "for you caused me greater sorrow
than perhaps any woman caused man before.
But you are long, very long ago forgiven before
you asked it; by the anguish you caused me.
By the memory of the torture and grief I suf-
fered for your sake, you are forgiven. Do you
think that one who loves as I do could refuse
pardon, even were it not asked?"

And as he spoke he stooped and raised her, raised her with the gorgeous beauty of the flowers scattered all about her, with her pale, upturned face framed in a shower of falling golden hair, raised her and held her from him, gazing silently yet passionately on this girl that he adored, grown, through suffering and hardship, into a woman lovelier than he had ever dreamed—longing to take her to his heart and call her his, yet restrained by something he could read in the white, soft face.

“Have mercy on me!” she cried, at length. “I was wrong to marry you, even to please my father; but I was young, and in sorrow. Have mercy on me, and let me go!”

“Have mercy on you!” he answered, hoarsely; “and you will have none on me! Oh! love, have I not suffered most? Has not my fate been the hardest? If mercy is wanted for any, surely it is for me. Pity me as you are a woman, have compassion on me!”

“I cannot,” she answered. “And I would that the waters were rolling above my head, sooner than this should have come to pass. It

tures us both, and we must never meet more, or I shall fly from this happy home, and seek a hiding-place in the wide world again."

"And this is the end of all—of all I have suffered and toiled and striven for your sake; only a cold command to leave you! My wife—I must call you once by that dear name before we part for ever—will you not say to me one kind word, that may sound in my ears in distant lands; will you not give me one first and last caress, the remembrance of which may cross my mind in weary hours, and beguile my misery with the recollection?"

He drew her towards him as he spoke, and would have kissed her; but she stepped back, crying, with a startled look in her dark eyes,

"No, no! I have called Heaven to witness that no word or sign of love should you ever receive from me, and the curse of God would light on me should I break my vow."

"And this is my fate," he muttered. "It was worth living for to be treated thus! Farewell, then," he went on; "perhaps some day you will know how truly I have loved you, and that I

hold life itself but a toy in comparison with you. But we shall never meet again—I trust that; and when at last some true gleam of pity shall visit your heart, I shall be gone beyond reach of knowing that you have thought kindly of me."

Then pressing her hands passionately to his heart, he took up a spray of sweet-smelling verbena that was caught in the trimming of her dress, and left the room, looking back at her cowering, shrinking figure with the long steadfast look of a man who knows that he is taking his last glance at all the world holds dear to him.

He had come down to Northamptonshire for the purpose of hunting; but now all idea of this was abandoned, and in a few days more he was once again a wanderer over the face of the deep, his only companions his trusty crew, who liked their skipper in spite of his gloom, because they knew him to be bold and daring, courageous as far as courage could go, and always caring for their safety above his own.

When he left her, Cecil fell on the floor and

thought over all that had happened, long and earnestly. She could not help feeling hard towards this man, and yet to-day something in his face and manner had softened her in spite of herself.

His countenance carried so plainly the traces of great suffering upon it, and his dark curly hair was already beginning to be streaked with grey. She knew now that she had done him a great wrong, and yet she did not feel herself equal to the task of repairing her mistake. She knew well what Edythe's advice to her would be, but she could not follow it. No, she felt that even if she gave in now, owned what she had done, and went back to her husband, she should hate him. And the greater his love for her, the more she would despise and abhor him, because he had not been able to tear from his heart this weakness for one who had so treated him.

Thus when Lady Lenington returned, she found her friend still crouched on the floor, with tearful eyes and a white rigid face, surrounded by drooping and withered flowers that had

been left there to die, after the sudden interruption Cecil's plan of settling them had received.

"What is the matter?" Edythe cried, on entering the room, and perceiving that something had gone wrong; "you look quite scared and frightened."

"I have been discovered," she murmured. "He was here, and found me out."

"And which he—or who is he, if I may ask?" demanded Lady Lenington, with provoking coolness. "You know there's only one he I think should have such an effect on you, and as you have been very hard on him (don't be angry with me for saying it), I think if he did turn up, you ought to reward him; but that is only my own idea, and I wouldn't wish to force you to do anything because I think it right. But he can't have been the one that has so overwhelmed you, I think, because he was yachting among the Ionian Isles a short time ago; I was told by some one who met him there, and I've not heard of his return to this country since."

"He has returned, however," answered Cecil;

"and was here to-day, when I came in with these flowers. Oh! Edythe, I thought I should have died when I saw his horrified eyes fixed on me. Do you know, I never until that minute remembered that he must have suffered too, when I was supposed to have been drowned at Athlone. I thought so much of my own escape, and of my fears that he should track me, that I never dreamed he could blame himself for it, and be in grief about it."

"Poor fellow! he did suffer, as I know," replied Lady Lenington, softly; "but I hope his trials are over now, and that you have made up your mind to make him happy."

"I know you will blame me," she answered; "but I cannot—it is impossible. Only I feel, after what I have seen and passed through to-day, that it would have been better for me to have ended the matter at once by a plunge into the Shannon, that time when I made them think I had done so, than to live on in this way; my only use in the world seeming to be to torment a faithful heart like his, that might be happy were I gone."

Lady Lenington said nothing, and gathered up the flowers. She could not feel with her friend in this matter, but she could at least refrain from blaming one who had already suffered enough. She was silent, therefore, and the subject was dropped between them. The Marchioness now, however, when they would soon be returning to London, became aware of one or two things that occasioned her a little troublesome thought. One of these was that some of their country neighbours had found out that Miss Lacy was lovely, and, undeterred by her quiet grave manner, began to do homage at her shrine; the other was that if, as she had wished at first, before she had sufficiently considered the matter, Cecil should choose to go out with her, people in London would soon find out the same thing as those in Northamptonshire, and that would indeed be a troublesome business; there being a very insurmountable barrier, of which the world knew nothing.

"I can't help it," she said with a sigh at length, after puzzling her head for some time over the unexpected difficulties that seemed

cropping up around her. "Truly," she added, with a smile, "the troubles of a chaperon are increased a thousandfold when the young lady is in reality married, though unknown to those around her. I'll ask Lenington about it."

Lenington, when asked, gave it as his opinion, that they should be allowed to manage it among themselves. "Don't you trouble yourself about it," he added; "Miss Lacy, alias Mrs. Houston, will refuse them if they propose; but it strikes me they won't, as a girl without money in these days, no matter how lovely she may be, rarely meets with more than a mere passing admiration from our London gentlemen, who are often not only as penniless as herself, but over head and ears in debt also."

This advice sounded well certainly, and Lady Lenington found it would bear acting on, also; so, after a time, she ceased to feel trepidation at any amount of moths fluttering around the pretty brilliant taper she had lighted in their midst.

Not but that one or two got badly scorched, because they would not be warned by her grave,

reserved manner, and her general unwillingness to go into society. For it was but seldom she went out, and then only to please Lady Lenington, who said: "If you don't show sometimes, they'll think I'm a kind of ogress, and keep you shut up because I'm jealous of you."

When she did appear in public, more than one person remarked her likeness to that pretty Miss Leveston, belonging to the —th Dragoons, that was going out here one season, and was afterwards drowned in Ireland, you know ; but as yet she had escaped meeting with anyone who remembered her sufficiently well to be certain of her identity.

Before they went back to London, and a few days after Colonel Houston's sudden appearance, Cecil received a letter from his man of business, telling her that gentleman had been with him, and made a will, in which he left everything of which he might die possessed to his wife, then living, under the assumed name of Miss Lacy, with the Marchioness of Lenington ; also, that he had directed the lawyer to

acquaint her with the fact that the sum of £500 per annum was to be paid to her account quarterly, at any place which she should name. The letter was directed to Miss Lacy, according to Colonel Houston's instructions, that her incognito should be preserved as long as she wished.

This letter she received at breakfast, and Lady Lenington could tell, from the flush that overspread her cheeks, and the tears that sprang to her eyes, there was something in it that affected her deeply. She said nothing, however, being, above all things, careful never to force confidence where it was not willingly given; but no sooner had they left the breakfast-room, and the Marquis had retired to his study, than Cecil put the communication into her hand, saying simply, "Read that."

Not a word was spoken on either side whilst Lady Lenington glanced over the contents; then she looked up, a little proudly perhaps, into the downcast face beside her, saying,

"Just what I should have expected."

"But don't you see, Edythe, dear, I can't

take it," said Cecil, timidly. "It is very good and noble of him to treat me so, I allow, when I have behaved so hardly to him; but having acted as I have done, I will not be beholden to him for money—no, rather will I go back to my old life as a workwoman than use one farthing of this allowance he makes me."

"Remember," answered her ladyship, "you are his wife, and as such he has a right to support you. I can quite understand that you feel it a hard thing to accept money from one from whom you will not accept love; but it is not too late to change all that yet. This man, doubtless, has Colonel Houston's address. Make up your mind to do the right thing bravely: write to him, tell him you see your error in time, that you have been too hard on him, and that, if he will return and forgive you, you will try to do your duty by him as a wife should."

"But I don't like him, Lady Lenington—I don't yet, though I think better of him now than I ever thought it possible I could. He has behaved nobly to me, though he spoilt my life, and persecuted the man I loved. But for

Gerald Anstruther's sake, I should be his now. I feel it was only the thought of him lying far away in a strange land that steeled my heart against this man's petition the other day, when he begged for one kind word, one first and last caress, to take with him into his exile. I was harder than iron then, thinking of wrongs I was powerless to avenge, except in that one way. Oh! Edythe, help me to decide! It is not in my nature to be so hard and cold, and my conduct at that last meeting has lain like lead on my heart ever since. Now this, his thought for me in the moment of his greatest misery, cuts me like a knife. Truly he has heaped coals of fire on my head. Tell me what I shall do. Oh! if only Gerald was alive, I could hold out for ever; but he is gone, and even he, I think, would have been kinder to his enemy than I have been."

"If you ask me my advice," said Lady Lenington, drawing the weeping girl to her, "I tell you what I would do in your place. Remember you are both dear to me; he is the only man that I ever cared for as a girl will

care for some one in the first fresh Spring-time of her youth; and though the wildness and strength of that love has fled, and left me, I hope, a wiser and truer woman, still I feel for him, and would fain see him happy. And my first liking for you, dear child, arose from the fact that you had gained the love I had striven for in vain. Many would have hated you for that—I didn't; you were the one he chose, therefore it seemed to me there must be something better and more love-worthy in you than in others, for him to have singled you out from all. Now, it appears to me you will neither of you be really happy, or take up the position in life which is ordained for you, until you do your duty by each other, as the vows by which you bound yourselves require. He has already done all that it was in the power of man to do to win your affection, and prove himself worthy of your regard. You, as yet, have made no movement towards the right; you have tortured and wronged him (let me speak strongly, for it is the truth). Now, before it is too late, make him the only reparation in your power—

write, and bid him return. If you make up your mind to do as you ought truly, it will not be hard with one who loves you as he does. Take my advice, dear—will you not?”

“You have conquered,” answered the girl, with a trembling voice; “but you are hard on me. If I have been cruel and cold to him—if I have tortured and wronged him, what shall be said of the love of my youth, persecuted and injured, because he dared be true to me?—or his being hunted from his native land, under the ignominious stain of a crime falsely laid to his charge—of his death in want and misery, where no friendly voice could cheer him, no word of love reach him? Oh! it is madness to think of it!” she cried wildly. “The last time I saw him, almost the last words I said, I swore never to be Houston’s wife—never to give him word or sign of love; and yet, though I have kept myself free from any stain of affection for him, yet I am married to him. Oh! Edythe, did you know this before? I cannot willingly break my vow. I see him in death thinking of me as faithful always; it

would disturb his rest if I were false now."

Lady Lenington sighed.

"You are indeed to be pitied," she answered ;
"and in this case the right is hard to find. If you care for the dead, you consign a living soul to a life of misery and sorrow ; and truly the living are the most to be pitied, for the dead at least can be troubled no more by human woe ; and yet, if you prefer the happiness of the man who lives only for you, your oath to him who is gone is broken ; and an oath to the dead is a solemn thing, so solemn that I know not how to advise you. Captain Anstruther was a brave soldier and an honourable man, I have heard ; were he alive, surely he would absolve you from your vow, when it had been broken to give a dying father peace. Listen. Write to Houston, and tell him what you have told me—that you would gladly do your duty by him, but for a solemn vow made to one that is dead ; that were he alive you would never have been false to him, but that now, as he is where no care or trouble can reach him, if he, knowing the circumstances that bind you, still

desire it, you will strive to be a good true wife to him for the rest of your life. Explain to him well the nature of your vow ; he is an honourable man, and, even for the dear love he bears you, will not urge your return to him if he thinks you bound irrevocably by your oath. You will then have done all that in you lay to reward, in some degree, his devotion towards you. Do this, dear, and you will never repent it."

Thus, after much and long-troubled thought, she wrote to the lawyer for his address, got it, and composed a letter of the tenor Lady Lenington had advised her. It was a painful task, and cost her many tears, but it was done at last and posted ; the only address the lawyer had being Callao. To that distant land had Houston resolved to go when he left England after his last miserable interview with Cecil. It would take him a long time to get thither, and amongst the grandeur of the scenery of the Andes he might hope to find as much distraction from his sad thoughts as he could ever hope to enjoy in this life. To that land he had

gone, and thither Cecil's letter followed him.

In the meantime they had returned to London, and though pre-occupied and low about her own troubles, one of the first places the girl visited was her old home at Mrs. Chatterton's. She found the good lady in great force, for Jim, having learnt that what he wished for was unattainable, had at last resolved to content himself with what was attainable, and was about to be married to the daughter of the struggling greengrocer.

"Which she's a good girl, Miss," explained the old landlady; "not that beautiful as to have the world running after her, but good-looking enough for the likes of us, that mightn't be as well able to resist the snares of the enemy like those as knows better. Not but what she have a silk gown and do dress lovely, to be sure—a sight better nor you, which I tell her it's not becoming her position. And I do think, now, them dresses, with yards of stuff sweeping up the mud, like a scavenger's cart, is not clean, nor likewise becoming, in a body as has to be tramping about a house such as mine all day;

and moreover, the streets being that deep in mud you could take it up in shovelfuls, you may say one day out spoils them entirely."

And Cecil was at the wedding, and made a handsome present to the young couple, to Mrs. Chatterton's great delight.

CHAPTER X.

ATONED FOR AT LAST.

FAR away over the green waters roamed the Colonel, seeking oblivion from his misery everywhere, and everywhere pursued by the memory of a pale, sweet face that had never looked in love on him, though he had given it his heart's devotion. Through the luxuriant and fatal splendour of West Indian isles, where thousands of white men have laid their bones since first Columbus opened their riches to the poor and avaricious denizens of the eastern world—through the still more gorgeous and fatal swamps of deadly Guiana, past the mighty Amazon, and ever southwards, touching here and there, wherever the beauty of nature tempted him, he wandered, never stopping

long in one place, wending his way slowly onwards to the coast of Chile, where he had made up his mind to abide for a while, and endeavour, amidst the grandeur and dangers of the Andes, in expeditions after the vicuna and condor on the heights, the panther and jaguar in the valleys, to forget for a time, in active exertion, the failure of all the hopes he had once cherished.

He rounded the wild and gloomy Horn, being tossed and buffeted there by conflicting winds and waves; and sometimes, when the tight little *Swallow* seemed in danger, he thought with a shudder how desolate it would be to lose one's life there, at the extremest limit of the world almost, and be hurled on the black and gloomy rocks, to remain unseen by human eye, uncared-for by human hand, with no one word of regret or sorrow carved above to mark where a kindred soul—one who had erred and suffered, sinned and striven—had given up life at last.

No doubt there are many such resting-places the wide world through, and the stormy sea

that threatened so often to engulf them held thousands such. But it seemed to him his fate would be even worse than it already was, if he was to pass away without any record of his death—that so she might never have the certainty she was released from bondage; and more—he fondly hoped, whenever the day might come, and he should pass away for ever, she would think a few kind thoughts, and breathe a sigh of pity over the life she had unwillingly shared and darkened. So, in the hour of danger, he prayed wildly—

“Not there—not there! Let my resting-place be in some quiet English graveyard, where her step may pause above me, if she comes to see the spot where I lie—where her hand may one day pick the daisies that grow around me, if she thinks with kindness of me after I am gone.”

His prayer was heard, or his work in life was not yet done, for they weathered the Horn, and the gallant boat, coming into calmer seas and fairer winds, sped onwards up the coast. They glided ever northward, to warmer

and sunnier lands, through a smiling, sleeping ocean, till, like the fabled lotos-eaters, the seamen could have been content to rest thus for ever; and even the passionate, fiery heart that was ever fighting an inward battle, felt a kind of gentle torpor stealing over it in that golden Summer light, where disturbing and unquiet thoughts had hardly power to come.

And the grand line of the Andes rose inland, with their snow-capped summits, that took such gorgeous tints when the light of the setting sun fell on them, till the heavens seemed ablaze with splendour, and the short tropical twilight was beautiful as Paradise.

Still onwards and northwards they floated; labour was over, rest was sweet. The balmy breeze wafted the swift-sailing yacht forward with almost imperceptible motion, and during that spell of lovely Summer weather they glided up what it seemed to them the Spaniards had so rightly named "El Mar Pacifico," and anchored at last off Callao.

Houston did not think of letters when he first arrived there. Anything of the nature of

that one which had arrived before him, and was now awaiting him there, it would never have entered into his mind to expect; so he forgot all about the post-office, collected guides and followers to the number he deemed requisite, and started for the mountains. Peter Lynn, the sailing-master of the yacht, remained behind to look after her, and keep his crew together; and one day, as he was strolling about the streets, feeling idle and lazy, a Spaniard came towards him, and entered into conversation with him. After a little chat, the stranger asked—

“Isn't your Señor Capitan called Houston—Houston—something of that kind? I can't quite make it out.”

“Yes, Houston,” Lynn answered; “but who are you, and why do you ask?”

“I am one of the functionaries of the post,” the man remarked, with an important air, “and I have seen a letter in our office some time, marked ‘To be kept till called for.’ To tell the truth, it is the only thing I have to look at, except the flies buzzing about over my head,

when I'm in there during business hours ; and I've got so tired of puzzling over this particular letter, and wondering how you English pronounce the name, that when I heard the owner of your boat was called something like that, I hoped he'd send for it ; but he didn't, and I was afraid to send it to him, because there is 'To be kept till called for' written on it. Only I wish it was away ; I'm tired of it."

"Why don't you turn the address to the wall?" asked Lynn, laughing.

"I'd know what was on the other side," answered the post-office functionary, "and it would fidget me just as badly. Besides, Rosita will open it some day, and get it read to her, I'm sure. She says it's in a woman's handwriting ; and you English are so tender about such things, there might be a war because of it, if anything of the kind was to happen."

"Well, in that case," replied Lynn, "I think I'll call for it now, if you'll give it me ; and it will save the Señora Rosita from getting into trouble, as I have an idea our skipper would not like anything belonging to him opened."

When Peter Lynn did receive the letter, he perceived that, beside the injunction mentioned by the Spaniard, there was 'immediate' written on the outside of the envelope; and he accordingly determined to leave the yacht in the charge of Jack Doyle, the steadiest of the seamen, at the same time requesting H.M.S. *Oberon*, at that time in the harbour of Callao, to keep a look-out on her, whilst he went up the country to see if he could overtake his employer, and deliver the letter into his hands.

He knew something of the direction in which Colonel Houston had gone, and hoped, by making inquiries of the inhabitants, to succeed in tracing him, and, detained as he was by hunting, in coming up with him before long. If, however, he found there was no prospect of overtaking him speedily, he would return to the yacht and await him there. Accordingly he secured the services of an Indian guide, and set out in the direction taken by his skipper a few days before. Inquiring constantly whether he had been seen, they followed the line thus indicated, which led them further and higher into

the mountains day by day, gaining slowly but surely on those of whom they were in search.

In the meantime, Houston, pushing forward with energy, had penetrated far into the recesses of the mountains, and as high as shelter and food could be obtained, before stopping to hunt. It was his intention to leave the low-land sport till his return. At first, when he found himself among the hills, the grandeur, the vastness, the sublimity of every sight and sound overawed him, and kept his troubles from intruding themselves into his mind. It was as if a heavy weight of overpowering admiration had been laid on his brain, which forbade the intrusion of all painful or disagreeable thoughts; but, after a time, human nature again asserted itself, and he found that in action and toil alone could he hope for peace.

Then he entered into the risks and perils of the wild hunting-parties his followers organised, with a zeal and energy that arose, not from the pleasure their excitement would once have afforded him, but because, after a day spent in

such a manner, his rest was dreamless and unbroken. So it happened they were hunting the vicuna, stalking them as we would deer, only that no pursuit of the antlered monarch of the parks and mountains of Great Britain can give an idea of the danger and difficulties attending the chase on which Houston was now engaged.

There are, perhaps, no animals more shy and difficult of approach than these, having, besides, the advantage of frequenting ground so dangerous as to be almost impracticable. However, Houston, guided by his attendants, succeeded in getting within range of a herd grazing on the top of a cliff a little distance from him, and that wound along almost over his head, he being concealed from the sight of his quarry by projecting rocks. The ledge on which he himself stood was very narrow, and overhung a tremendous precipice, on looking over which could be seen, thousands of feet below, the green waving tops of the primeval forest, gleaming bright in the golden sunlight.

Satisfied that he was within range, and seeing symptoms of uneasiness among the herd,

Houston took aim and fired. His shot was successful. The wounded animal sprang into the air, and then galloped wildly along the edge of the cliff, in his direction. Just at the spot where he was concealed it dropped dead, and falling over the cliff, struck Houston in its descent, nearly tumbling him from his narrow resting-place, and bounding off again, continued its way down to the valley below. It did not fall quite so far, however. About half-way down was a road, winding along the face of the cliff, which, at the height Houston was above it, looked like a mere ribbon. When down below, it was broad enough, and just as the mangled body, torn by the projecting points of rock, that had caught it in its descent, fell on the roadway, two travellers were passing.

"Hulloa!" cried one of them—Peter Lynn it was. "What have we here. "Some one hunting up above there has lost his dinner, it seems to me. Shot by a rifle bullet too, as well as I can make out, with the carcass in this condition. I shouldn't wonder if it was the skipper.

Miguel," he continued, turning to his guide, "there's a hunting-party up there; I think it is the one we're looking for; we must try and join them."

Then they set to work to find their way up; and some time before evening lighted on a camp, which Lynn recognised as his master's by several things scattered about, though the natives in charge of them he had not met before. He inquired after Houston, found he was expected back that evening, and also was convinced, what he had been pretty sure of before, that it was a shot from Houston's own rifle which had brought down the vicuna, just in time to warn them of his being in the vicinity, and save them a further journey.

At night-fall, when Houston returned, jaded and worn out, his surprise was great to see the master before him, and learn that he had left the yacht to deliver a letter.

"But you see, sir," urged the faithful fellow, "it had 'immediate' on it, and I thought as how it might be important."

"Important indeed!" cried Houston when

he caught sight of the handwriting, almost snatching it from the man. "You did very right," he added. "Throw another log on the fire; I can't see to read."

It was not the dulness of the fire-light that prevented his seeing, but the wild throbs of rapture and hope, that made him feel for a minute dizzy and stunned, as he tore open the envelope. It was short, and when he had finished reading he buried his face in his hands and thought over it. There was not any love, and very little of kindness or pity expressed in it; only the desire to do what was right, and thanks for his great goodness and consideration to her. She told him plainly, had Gerald Anstruther lived she would never, even for her father's own sake, have married him; she told him of her vow when she and her lover parted, and said clearly, the memory of the dead man was dearer to her than he could ever be. "You know all now," it concluded; "do as you think right—I will abide by your decision."

Was not happiness dawning for him at last, he mused; even the very accident that had

directed Lynn to him that day did it not show that Providence was on his side. It mattered little if the letter was cold or stiff, time would heal all wounds, and love would draw out love. His day was come now; it was good for him that he had lived over his trials; others had suffered more, as Paget once told him. But stay; this was not the point of her letter. He had been told of a vow made against this bliss he longed for, and it had been given him to decide whether that vow was binding or not. This was what he had to do, and if he found himself bound to decide against himself, he must do so, and abide by it. Through the long starry night he lay sleepless, seeking with aching heart to draw counsel and wisdom from above, but for a long time all light appeared to fail him.

At length the peaceful beauty of the night calmed his troubled heart, and seemed to say to him, "The dead are at peace—mortal love, and strife, and hatred do not touch them; what the dear ones on earth do cannot pain them, they are beyond that. If this man were alive,

she would be bound by her vow, but to the dead she owes no allegiance. This is the truth, as I believe it. I will return and tell her so."

Early in the dawn the party was astir, and soon on their way back to Valparaiso. Then the yacht was put in readiness, and before a fortnight had elapsed since his receipt of the letter Houston was on his way back to England. It was now Winter in those latitudes, and the voyage round the Horn must necessarily be wild and stormy; but he who had dreaded before that iron-bound, inaccessible coast, now confronted its dangers with a light heart. He had won at last; he was going back to happiness and her; what if there should be danger and peril before him from the elements, he feared them not. His boat was tight and strong; she had weathered many a gale ere now; give her but good sea-room, and he feared nothing for her. The only trouble he could see before him was the struggle to gain her love; but even that would be conquered in time, he felt certain.

And thus he dreamed always, as the yacht

dashed her way onwards, throwing back the foaming billows from her bows, and sweeping ever forward swiftly, with a pleasant, seething, hissing sound that told how fleetly she cut her way through the waters.

Southwards, ever southwards, where the air was chill as death, the *Swallow* sailed over the dark rollers, mountain-like masses of water, on the top of which she rose sometimes almost up to heaven like a cork, and then plunged downwards into a trough so deep that it seemed the wave following her must fall and overwhelm her before she could mount again. But she was a staunch little vessel, and the men were true and bold, and the struggle was for their lives; so they bore ever onward, and escaped danger, as it seemed by a miracle.

Sometimes when he talked cheerfully with Lynn of England, and what he would do when they returned home, an old Scotch sailor overhearing them would walk away gloomily, muttering,

"The skipper is surely fey to speak like that, and we out here at the Horn, in sich-like

weather, aboard a cockle-shell like this. Not but that she's a good bit boatie; but she wasn't built for a voyage like this, I'se warrant."

They met with no ice, however—indeed it wasn't the time of year for that danger; it is during the Summer and Autumn that the icebergs float up from the southern pole into more northern latitudes, till they are gradually dissolved by the increasing heat of the water and the atmosphere. These are perhaps the greatest perils that menace vessels in these latitudes, and these, at least, they escaped, braving tempest and storm, and battling their way onwards, till they arrived off that wild and gloomy headland that terminates the American continent.

It was towards nightfall, and the sea was very tempestuous, when they became aware of a large vessel some way off, that seemed, to the experienced eyes of Houston's sailors, as if there was something wrong with her.

"There's a ship in distress, Colonel," said Lynn, approaching, and touching his cap as he spoke to his skipper. "I've been looking at her

through the glass," he went on, "and I see her boats are gone, yet there are people aboard her for all that. Most like the cowards tried to escape, and have either got off with the boats or were lost in the attempt. She seems sinking, by the way she's settling down into the water."

"Let us bear down on her," cried Houston, springing up with sudden energy. "We may be able to save at least some of them. Look alive, men, or we may be late after all."

"Take care, Colonel," murmured Lynn, warningly. "Don't go too nigh her, or we shall get swamped ourselves by all them drowning wretches, who'll try to get aboard us at once."

"Never fear," said Houston; "I'll take care those who come will not swamp us. I have got something to live for now," he murmured, "and daren't risk my life as I once might."

So they bore down on the sinking vessel, which proved to be a merchantman of great size, homeward-bound from some of the Australian colonies, the master imagined. She was

evidently hopelessly water-logged, and settling down fast; yet even now her vast bulk towering above them gave these wanderers on the wide ocean some idea of the smallness and insignificance of their craft, that had weathered the gale in which the larger one was foundering. As they approached, human forms could be seen rushing to the side of the ship on which they were, and Lynn affirmed they took the yacht for the *Flying Dutchman*.

“Not but what the Dutch fellow hangs out near the Cape (of Good Hope, I mean, Colonel); but these fellows don’t know that, and they think we’re coming to summon them to Davy Jones’ locker, instead of trying to save them from it.”

“Ship ahoy!” he sang out, as soon as they were within hailing distance; “We can’t come nearer to you, but heave a rope here, and we’ll save you—if we can save ourselves, that’s to say,” he added in an undertone.

As soon as the purport of this message was caught, a rope was thrown to the yacht, made fast, and numbers passed along it into the little

craft, which after a time received all remaining on board the merchantman, with the exception of a few who were swept away and drowned in attempting the passage. There were now more on board than the yacht could well carry, and the sailors were anxious to get away.

"We must bear away now, Colonel," called out Lynn; we've got as many as we can take. Unless the weather moderates, we'll find it hard to bring them all home safe; and where we'll stow them, I can't think."

"Just this one fellow more; we must have him; see, he's pushing a man who can't swim before him on a spar. I call that brave. We must take in these two."

"Then you might have saved yourself the trouble of taking any of them aboard, for we'll all go down together," answered Lynn. "Our craft can't live in this sea with such a freight."

"But here they are alongside," cried Houston. "Well, at least let us take in the one who can't swim."

"No more, then, Colonel," cried Lynn.

"Let us bear off as soon as he's in. Avast there, you that can swim," he went on, as Houston threw a rope to the man on the spar; "we can't take you in, we've more than we can save already."

By this time Houston had drawn the one he was rescuing to the side, and helped him on board. The addition to the little vessel's load had already become perceptible, and every minute the faces around expressed anxiety, as she seemed to sink into, instead of riding over the waves; but she recovered herself bravely, and then the voice of the man left behind struggling in the waters was heard crying, "Have you not room for one more? Save me too, I implore of you!"

Something caused Houston to turn and look in that direction, when a sight met his eyes that seemed to freeze the very blood in his veins, and for a minute almost turned him to stone. Then he sprang forward, and throwing a rope to him, cried to Lynn: "This man I must and will save, come what may!"

"No more, then, or it will cost us our lives," cried Lynn. "If you don't care for your own life, Colonel, think at least of ours."

"We will not have him!" cried the men around, those saved and the crew in chorus together. "What right," said the strangers menacingly, "has this man to endanger our lives;" forgetting totally that a minute before he had saved them. "Toss him over!" cried some of the rougher ones, "the boat will ride lighter without him."

But the man struggling in the water, clinging to the storm-tossed spar, seemed too exhausted to catch the rope and fasten it around himself. Again and again it eluded his grasp, and at last Houston, watching his fruitless endeavours, saw that before long the waves would sweep him from his hold, and he would be lost.

"I must swim out to him, and tie the rope round him," cried Houston, throwing off his coat and other encumbrances.

"No, Colonel," said Lynn; "not that. What is the fellow worth to you? He's a brave man, for he saved his friend, but he's not worth your

life. Better than he are drowned every day."

Whilst Lynn was speaking, Houston had torn a leaf from his pocket-book, and on it wrote a few words. He then folded it, directed it, and gave it to the master, saying, "If I am lost, give this to that man, if he is saved." The words in it, few and simple, were, "Farewell. Is the wrong at last atoned for? Forget me, and be happy." On the other side was written, "Captain Anstruther, deliver this with your own hand to Miss Lacy, at the Marchioness of Lenington's, Grosvenor Square." "Now," he muttered, "if I go, he will still find her."

Then, approaching the side, he sprang into the mountainous billows, and struck out for the drowning man. It seemed long to those on board, as they watched him battling with the storm, ere he reached the spar; but at last he caught it, unfastened the rope from his waist, tied it to the man he came to save, and shouting to those on board to draw him in, whispered hoarsely, as he pushed the almost unconscious form towards the yacht, "Tell her it was for her sake."

As he spoke, and struck out again towards the yacht, a huge wave sweeping past them carried him a way into the deepening twilight; while the stranger, none other than Anstruther, who in that brief minute had recognised Houston, was rapidly drawn towards the yacht, on board of which he was presently safe, and surrounded by rough but friendly care. Then, when all eyes turned to look for the man who had so gallantly risked his life to save another, he was gone from sight—nowhere to be seen, nowhere heard. Darkness was coming on rapidly as they beat about in every direction, searching for the missing man, but all in vain; he had been swept away by the seething waters, beyond hope of recovery or recall. He, in the meantime, had again caught the spar, and as he was carried away, thought bitterly, a few hours sooner, or a few later, he should be swept from his resting-place, and, as he had once imagined with so keen a pang of horror, his mangled body would be thrown at last on the black and icy rocks that guard that gloomy land. He knew, when he was swept from the yacht, he must meet his

death, and it had not made him quail. He could remember now distinctly many and many a time that he had faced danger before, and had come off conqueror. On the far-distant heights of the Alma and Inkermann; on the burning plains of India, when his sabre had been as the sword of Azrael, cutting down turbaned heads in bitter vengeance for cruelties perpetrated, for wrongs done; he could feel still the deep throb of pain when a Rajpoot spear caught him in the shoulder, and nearly bore him from the saddle, as he charged madly down on them with his regiment. Had he fallen then, his fate was sealed; but he kept his seat, and rode onwards, the weapon tearing the quivering flesh as he passed. He had escaped death then, as he had that threatened by the Russian shell that killed his horse under him; and now he was here, face to face with the last enemy again, and this time he feared there was no deliverance for him.

Waiting for the cold hand to grasp him—
waiting for that dim, gaunt presence to over-
shadow him—waiting for a numbness to over-

spread him more terrible than the chill of the ice-cold waters—waiting for a lonely, pitiless death in that hungry, engulfing foam—this was what he knew must come—this was what he clung to the spar expecting—this was what struck terror at last into the brave, bold heart, till he almost felt in his agony, “Why did I do it? The bitterness of death was almost past with him; already he was spent, and would have succumbed quickly. I am strong, and my strength is the power of feeling agony. How long it takes to die!”

But now the yacht had passed from sight; even when tossed high up on the mountainous waves, he could catch no glimpse of it, yet he clung on still, and waited; and he drifted slowly nearer and nearer to the giant-towering cliffs that had been so far in the offing when they met the sinking vessel; and he could tell that in a few short hours, whether he lived or died, his body would be hurled on the rocks, and there lie, the sport of the wintry winds, the plaything of the furious waves, till all human semblance had been taken from it; and even

the Summer sun, when it should visit that dreary land once more, would find no fragment remaining on which its rays might fall, like a pitying thought from the land of his birth, over his untimely fate.

Oh! it was agony thus, in the pride and force of manhood, to feel the freezing waters slowly chilling the life-blood in his veins, to feel his strength slowly departing, as still he clung to the shattered spar. And she would never know, except from careless, unsorrowing lips, what he had dared and done for love of her! Would she even know it was for her sake? He hoped so, at least; hoped that she would know it and pity him, and grieve a little for him, with a gentle tender sorrow; but that she should know the anguish he endured, that she should form any idea of the appalling shape in which the sacrifice had presented itself to him, he prayed not.

The horrors of those long hours of waiting, if she could but realise them, would blast her happiness, and chill the joy with which she must welcome her lover from the dead; it were

even better that she should know nothing than that she should know all. And he—the man whom he had saved—would he think kindly of his sometime enemy; would he recognise in that act reparation for a hasty judgment, atonement for a cruel wrong? And would he feel that the gift made him was indeed priceless; would he value the love thus delivered over to him?

“If only she is happy,” he thought, as a deadly chill crept over him, and his stiffened hands could hardly retain their grasp of the spar, whilst the thunder of the breakers, and the trampling of the surf on the narrow beach, sounded louder and louder in his ears. “I would I could lie in mine own land,” he murmured, as a vision of English fields and pastures rose before him, and the old-fashioned country-house his home, and the quiet little church, nestled down so peacefully amongst the trees of its surrounding graveyard; “and then, perhaps, as she passed to and fro from church, her eye would have fallen kindly on my resting-place; but even that was not to be.” Then, as he rose and fell on the tossing surge, a dreamy retro-

spect of his boyish days passed before him. He roamed once more through the dark old rooms, his footsteps echoed again along the narrow corridors; he played at ball with a fair-haired sister in the old oak hall; he rode his pony after the hounds on foggy November days; and then, as time went on, he could see himself a boy at school, liked by the masters because he was clever, admired by his playmates because he was daring and bold, but ever with few friends. After this his career in the army flitted before him: how he had pushed onward and upward, quicker than most men, for he had both abilities and interest, till he met her; and, as a remembrance of the first night, when she flashed in her loveliness before him, swam before his glaring eyes, an overwhelming mountain of water tore his stiffened fingers from their hold, and engulfed him for ever, one cry escaping his lips as he sank to rise no more, "My Queen, farewell!"

Though those on board the yacht spent hours looking for him, he was gone. Long and anxiously they searched, but only the whistling of the wind amongst the cordage, the shrill

scream of the passing sea-bird, the sullen dash and roar of the ceaseless ocean, answered their oft-repeated calls.

He was gone from them for ever; gone in the prime of manhood; gone in the performance of a noble deed; gone in storm and tempest off that wild and lonely shore, where he had prayed his bones might never lie.

"Heaven help his soul!" said Peter Lynn, dashing a tear from his weather-beaten eyes. "A braver man never lived. May he rest in peace!"

CHAPTER XI.

PEACE IN THE END.

WHEN the yacht sailed on her course at last without the Colonel, Anstruther began to realise, for the first time, that this man had really thrown his life away to save him—and why? This was what he could not understand. When last they met, Colonel Houston had been his bitterest enemy; hunting him down on a false charge, driving him out from his country and friends to seek a better fate, or it might be a worse, in distant lands. Now they had met again; had met when he, the oppressed and persecuted, had but a few moments' struggle between him and death, when the Colonel, as ever, had safety and power on his side.

And yet this man, of whom he had thought so hardly, this man whom he had hated, as men will hate one who has done them a deadly injury—this man had stepped between him and death—had given up his vantage-ground of safety—had taken Anstruther's place by trying to save him on the tempest-tossed ocean, and had lost his life thereby. Had he expected to lose his life? He could hardly believe so; and yet Houston's last words still rang in his ears, "Tell her I did it for her sake." Could his love have been so true to him that this man in despair had given up the struggle—had preferred to die and let him live, that she might be happy? If this were so, it was a noble deed, and the man who could so act was not the selfish tyrant they had all thought him. Perhaps, after all, he had believed the charge brought against his subordinate, and had only done what he considered his duty in having him tried and cashiered. Still, it had been evident then the Colonel hated him. What had made him act thus now? The mystery was inexplicable.

His perplexity was increased when Lynn gave him the folded slip of paper on which Colonel Houston had written before he left the yacht.

"I will fulfil this, his last request," he murmured, "at once on landing. But who can Miss Lacy be?—surely not some other love?"

But he could obtain no solution to his doubts, and waited with burning impatience to reach once more the English shore. All this time they had been sailing up the coast, and though the weather had moderated, and they were no longer in danger, still the heavy freight impeded their progress, and they got along but slowly. At Buenos Ayres they put in, and landed all those saved from the wreck, with the exception of Anstruther, to whom Peter Lynn, touching his cap respectfully, said,

"Him that's gone, sir, seemed to be particularly anxious about you, and as you'd have perhaps some time to wait before you'd meet a vessel returning direct to England, we'll take you on; not that we can go home straight either, for we have to touch here and there for provisions, as she don't carry victuals for

so many men on a long voyage. Still we'll be home first, I think, if you'd like to come with us."

To this Anstruther assented, right glad of any opportunity afforded him of getting sooner to his destination ; and then they pursued their way homewards, making good time of it now, when no longer overburdened by their human cargo.

In the meantime Cecil, at home in the Marchioness's comfortable mansion, thought often and anxiously of the letter she had sent to Callao. Had he received it ?—and if he had, would he answer it, or return at once ? What would be his course ? She could not even form a guess, but she was conscious of a desire within herself that he might consider her vow binding, and leave her still in peace, with the comforting thought that she had done her duty. So as time wore on, and she cheered herself with this idea, she became again comparatively happy ; and when Edythe Lenington remarked it, she answered gently,

"I feel as if my troubles were over, and that

now I may live in peace. My vow has saved me ; he will not urge me to break it."

"Incomprehensible girl!" cried Lady Lenington. "You are throwing away a noble heart, a priceless devotion ; some day you will regret your hard-heartedness."

"I feel for him now," she answered. "I would willingly reward him, but I am bound, therefore I rejoice that he ceases to follow me—that he sees the obligation as I do."

And thus they talked on a day when a worn and weary wanderer landed at Southampton, and the *Swallow* furled her storm-stained canvas again in English waters. As he trod once more his native land, this dark, seafaring-looking man wondered sadly whither he should turn his steps. He carried with him, certainly, an advertisement from a legal firm in London, which he had cut out of an English paper, stating that, if the next of kin of the late Honourable Richard Vereker would call on Messrs. Grey and Son, of No. 9, Inner Temple, they would hear something to their advantage ; and as his mother had been the only daughter of

that Richard Vereker, he had determined on going there immediately on landing, he having written to announce his coming, and state his claims, before leaving Queensland. But now he felt bound by the dead man's message to see Miss Lacy first; and besides, he had but two or three sovereigns with him, all that remained of the little stock he had fastened in a belt round his waist on that dreadful day when he saw the good ship *Petrel* was sinking, and had determined to attempt to reach the distant rock-bound coast by swimming, if no succour arrived.

Now, where was she?—she whom he had returned to find—she whose love had been the beacon luring him onward—the talisman that had heightened his courage, and carried him through dangers that would, without this incentive to action, have overwhelmed him—where was she? He had written to her too, when he wrote to the lawyer, so doubtless she would be expecting him; and if she heard of the loss of the *Petrel* before he could go to her, what would she not suffer?

The best course he could follow would be to go to London quickly, deliver this note, whatever it might be, into the lady's hands; and in the confusion the news of Houston's death would excite—for that, no doubt, he would be forced to tell—he would make his escape, go to the lawyer, learn what he had to communicate, then find out where the —th Dragoons were quartered, and proceed thither, where, no doubt, she was too, or where, at least, he would learn her present abode.

To London, therefore, he went, and made his way to the Marchioness's house, before the door of which he paused one minute, and mentally passed himself in review before his mind's eye. It seemed strange that he, haggard, dishevelled, with soiled clothes, and long, wild-looking beard, should be standing at the door of such a house as this, about to ask for one of its inmates, who, no doubt, was some graceful, high-born lady, or she would not have been a friend of Houston's. Would not his weather-beaten appearance provoke the scorn of the servants who conducted him to her pre-

sence, and perhaps excite terror in her? It might be better he should leave the note at the door in charge of the hall-porter, who would send it to her, and in this way both he and she would be saved annoyance. But when he drew out the little folded slip of paper, and saw that it was unfastened, his better nature prevailed. They would read it, he thought. "And besides, he trusted in me to deliver it with my own hands. She will forgive my intrusion when she knows what brought me; and for the scorn of flunkeys, that will not hurt me."

Then he rang, and the door was opened by a magnificent individual, who said,

"I suppose your business is with the kitchen. Why didn't you go to the area, good man?"

"My business is with Miss Lacy," answered Captain Anstruther, haughtily. "Can I see her?"

"I'll send and ask," said the man, admitting him into the hall with an air that said, "What do people like you want here? Mr. Mowles," he continued, addressing a groom-in-waiting, "can this person see Miss Lacy? Perhaps

you'd better send up your message," he went on, addressing the person again.

"If the lady is in, I will see her myself," answered Anstruther. "If not, I will call again."

"Miss Lacy is at home, sir; you can follow me," said Mr. Mowles, walking on, whilst Anstruther followed him like one moving in a dream.

It was so many years now, in thought and feeling, at least, if not in actual time, since he had trod on rich carpets, and passed up broad staircases, where the balustrades were quaint with carving, and the bowers of plants in the landings lived in the mellow light passing in through stained windows. All this he would once have looked on with indifferent eyes, when he was a gay lad going out in London life; now it seemed strangely gorgeous and unfamiliar to him, and he experienced a feeling of relief at last, when his conductor threw open the door of a quiet morning-room, the only place he deemed suitable for the reception of such a visitor.

"Miss Lacy shall be told you wish to see her, sir," he said, as he withdrew, moved into

some involuntary feeling of respect for this shabby-looking man, who bore, in spite of traces of toil and hardship, the unmistakable impress of a gentleman.

For some time Anstruther sat waiting, glancing now and then impatiently at the clock. Then he rose and went to the window, and though the view from it did not interest him, he fell into a deep reverie whilst watching the passers-by, from which he was not aroused by another person's entering the room. His back was turned towards the door, and he was half hidden by the muslin curtain, behind which he was standing, so that Cecil—for she it was—did not recognise him as she came forward timidly, wondering what it was this man wanted with her. Suddenly he became aware that a lady was approaching him, and began hurriedly,

“A letter which I was requested to deliver personally must excuse this——” He got no further, for though his eyes had hardly yet fallen on her, he had discovered who she was, and stood before her, murmuring passionately, “My Queen, don't you remember me?”

Then she raised her eyes to him for the first time; the voice had sounded strangely sweet and familiar to her, but, believing him dead, she had fancied some accidental likeness had deceived her, and, for fear of betraying emotion, had refrained from looking up. Now, when the well-known accents called her by the old dear name, she sprang forward into his arms, crying,

“Gerald!—is it you, returned indeed from the dead?”

This was a rapture they had neither of them hoped for; it was too unexpected, too overwhelming, and, for a time, neither of them could speak coherently. They could only gaze into each other's eyes, and read there tales of sorrow and trial, lived over and surmounted by each, for the sake of the dear one far away. And now when they met again, for a time all was forgotten, but the strength and sweetness of the affection that had supported them, the beauty of the faith that was rewarded at the last.

“But see,” said Anstruther, after a time, stoop-

ing and picking up the folded slip of paper which had fallen to the ground, "here is a note was sent by my hand to a Miss Lacy in this house. The poor fellow who wrote it is dead and gone now; it was he saved my life, and I owe all this happiness to him——"

He paused, for Cecil, who had taken the note from his hand, and looked at the address with gradually blanching cheeks, now opened it, and read the few short words contained in it, large tears gathering in her lovely eyes, and falling slowly on the paper as she read.

"Miserable woman that I am!" she cried, as she finished reading; "he is dead, and I am the cause! Oh! Gerald—my only friend now—do not turn from me; do not blame me, for I have a confession to make, and I am the most wretched of women! I am not true to you; I was not true to him; I have not even been boldly and openly false. I have nothing to say in extenuation of the misery I have wrought; it was weakness, despicable weakness caused it all."

"I don't understand you," murmured Gerald

Anstruther. "I know nothing of what has happened, but whether weak or strong, miserable or happy, you are as dear, nay, dearer to me now than you were when last we parted; and, if you love me still, we will never be separated. I think you love me yet," he whispered; "then don't fear—tell me what you like, or don't tell me, as you please—you are forgiven already."

"You shall hear everything from the minute you left till now," she gasped, as he put his arm round her and drew her towards him, "only don't be so good to me. You will turn from me when you know all."

Then she told him everything—of her father's accident; of his earnest entreaties she should marry Houston; of his long and tedious illness, fading slowly day by day, ever reiterating the same unheeded prayer to his sorrowing child; of the news of Anstruther's death; of the discovery of his innocence—and when she mentioned that that was proved she could feel the start of joy and surprise with which he received the intelligence; but he was silent still, spoke no

word, moved not, listened always in a grave and solemn silence, as she went on to tell of her father's death-bed ; of her forced marriage—as she mentioned that she felt his grasp on her tighten, but still no word or sound escaped him. Then she continued, telling of her flight ; her supposed death by drowning ; of the wedding-ring dropped into the foaming billows ; of the lonely arrival in London ; of Mrs. Chatterton's kindness, and her work in the milliner's establishment ; of her meeting with the Marchioness ; her coming to live with her ; of Houston's sudden appearance ; his wild appeal ; his sad farewell ; of his kind thought of her ; and at last of her giving in, and the letter she had written him ; since then of her waiting for an answer. "And thus it comes," she added, showing the crumpled paper clenched in her hand.

Until she had finished he spoke not ; then he drew her to his heart, and answered,

"Love, to me you have been faithful to death, and beyond death ; to me you have no fault ; dearer you could not be, but perhaps now I know you better. I see at last why that poor

fellow, whose letter you hold in your hand, sacrificed himself to save me. He was a noble heart; I was not worthy such a man should lose his life for me. But you don't understand how it happened. I must tell you, that we may both feel alike to the man who repaired a wrong so bravely—who bought the happiness of the one he loved at such a price."

So he told her of the good ship's springing a leak off the wild tempestuous Horn; of the attempt to lower the boats; of some being crushed to pieces against the side, of others being engulfed by the overwhelming billows; and, finally, of one that was lowered at last, and into which some of the crew sprang, having first placed in her a scanty provision; and how they had pushed off, leaving passengers and shipmates to perish, for fear, in the attempt to rescue any more, they might themselves be swamped; how, before they had gone far, and in the presence of all whom they had left behind, an avalanche of water entombed them, and they sank to rise no more. Then he went on to tell of the weary work at the pumps; of the toil by night and

day, and still the water gaining on them, till they felt their exertions were useless, and the good ship *Petrel* was settling down into that ice-cold, tempest-tossed ocean, with all her hundreds of human souls on board.

"There were not many women," he added, "and they were as calm as the men. There was no frantic weeping, no useless agonies of despair; all resigned themselves to their fate, a few of the best swimmers determining to try and reach the frowning cliffs, that lay miles away; others constructing a raft, with the faint hope it might be borne by the waves to that inclement shore, if indeed it were possible they could retain their hold on it; but I fear greatly none who tried that ever escaped to land."

Then he told of the agony of hope and excitement when the yacht hove in sight and bore down upon them, as near as its safety permitted; of the master's summons to them; and how all who could passed by the rope, and many more, who couldn't catch it, plunged in, in the hope of struggling over the short distance that separated them from the yacht; how, as he was

about to leave, a passenger who had been very kind to him called him, and showing him a spar floating in the water, asked if he (the passenger) could manage to spring to that and support himself on it, would he (Anstruther) help him to the yacht.

“It was not far to go, and I thought I could do it easily,” he went on; “the man had been good to me, and I determined to try. We did so, and succeeded in reaching the yacht; but it was already overloaded; we had been longer getting to it than the others, and the crew refused to take any more. The skipper, however, insisted on receiving my friend, and they were then about to put off when his eye fell on me.”

Then Anstruther described his agony whilst clinging to the spar, listening to the dispute of one man alone, against so many, for his rescue; and then, when the man who desired to save him swam out, and was about to tie the rope around him, how he had recognised his enemy.

And the man he dreaded and hated, to whom he laid the blame of all his sufferings, bent over him saying: “Tell her it was for her sake;

and now she will see my face no more." Then before he, clinging for his life, could understand or comprehend what was happening, his sometime enemy, now his preserver, was swept away ; and he, fainting with exhaustion and cold, was drawn in and saved. He told how the master had stopped to seek his skipper, and how no trace of him could be found ; of the note having been given him to deliver ; of the weary journey home ; of his fears and anxieties for her, in case she should have got his letter, and mourned him as dead. "But," he added, "I see now, you were dead yourself to all here ; the letter could never have reached you."

Then he showed her the advertisement that had brought him back all the way from Australia.

"My mother was that man's only living child, as long as I can remember," he went on ; "but there was a grandson, the son of a child by a former marriage, who was always supposed to be the heir to the old man's property, so that I never had any expectations in that quar-

ter ; this, however, looks as if something had gone wrong with him." Adding, that he would call on Messrs. Grey and Son that day, and find out what it all meant.

"But tell me," she murmured, "am I right to take a happiness so dearly bought? I feel as though it would be rejoicing in his death."

"Right?" he said; "it was for this end he did it, that you might be happy. If you are not, his sacrifice is in vain. Don't let it be so, dearest; and besides, have I too not suffered? Am I never to claim the prize for which I have toiled so long?"

"But how are you alive?" she asked, after a pause. "I have told you all; you must now tell me how it was you were supposed dead, and where you have been these more than three years, never writing one word in answer to all those letters I sent you regularly, until I heard my trouble was in vain."

He sighed.

"Those are sad memories too, for all who were with me perished. It was thus the rumour arose, and it was true of all but one. I was that one,

and only the thought of your love saved me. I started up the country with an exploring expedition, as you heard, but after we were many days out, and had pushed far past the utmost limits of the settled land, another man joined us. He told us he was a drover on an outlying run, and having got tired of his utter loneliness, he had made up his mind to join the first party of white men he met. Thus our number was swelled to ten, of which those in the settlements knew nothing; therefore, when the remains of our ill-fated expedition were discovered, the fact of there being nine men dead there together was considered a proof that I was lost too.

“ When we came to the outskirts of the desert, we pushed forward boldly, having been confidently assured that there were springs about two days' march further on, in a north-westerly direction; and for two days we travelled gaily forward, not seeing any necessity for economising the water we had with us, more than is usual to travellers in the wilderness who expect soon to come across an abundant supply.

Yet we were careful of it too, as we thought it not improbable we might have half a day's or a day's further journey to go before meeting with it."

"But our information had been sufficiently correct. The evening of the second day we came to the spot where the springs had been; where they now were no longer, having been dried up by long continued heat. Then we decided to press onward to another and larger pool of water, rumoured to be about a day's journey further on. Next day, accordingly, we set forth, and, at nightfall, had not yet arrived at the desired spot. We were already beginning to suffer from thirst, as our water was all used, but some high hilly ground further on, in the direction we had been told to pursue, looked promising, and we resolved to push thither next day, confident that, amongst those hills, the reported water-course must be. On we went, painfully onward, beasts and men alike weary and jaded; but the night closed in again before we reached the hills, and now, with gloomy fears, we sat down to wait the

coming of another day ; for sleep to our anxious minds and tortured bodies was impossible.

“On we toiled next day, and the next, but though we roamed through a bewildering labyrinth of low hills, we found none of the precious liquid for which we were all perishing. At last, on the fifth day, all had succumbed ; and I, at length, who had wandered some way further, dragging my almost dying beast after me, at last fell down, saying to myself all was over. As I lay there, too weak to stir, a vision of you sitting in your window working, as I had often seen you, rose before me with wonderful distinctness, and, as I gazed, you seemed to raise your eyes and look into mine with a patient quiet gaze that said, mutely, ‘ I am waiting.’

“‘One struggle more I will make!’ I cried, trying to stand, and looking round me for my horse, which I now perceived some little way off, dragging himself slowly along in a direction almost opposite to that in which our camp lay, and with a fixed purpose expressed by the determination with which he moved his trembling limbs onward. Could it be possible

he smelt water? He was not returning to the other horses at the camp, that was evident; at any rate, I might as well follow him as go elsewhere, and follow him I did. Onwards we struggled, both of us, I, at times, almost giving up; nothing but the wonderful perseverance evinced by the animal gave me courage to continue; but I became convinced there was some cause for his pertinacious advance, always in one direction.

“At length we arrived at the summit of a high hill, up which we must have been toiling for about two hours; and on looking down the slope on the other side, a sight met my eyes that might have been worshipped in that thirsty land, and that caused my steed to break into a shambling trot, as he too descended the hill, uttering a low joyful whinny at intervals.

“I followed at the best speed I could muster, and presently was standing by a pond or lake, not large in extent, but deep and, seemingly, inexhaustible. It lay in a narrow ravine, or cleft in the hills, which descended bare, barren and rocky, to within a short distance of its

shores, when the rocks became suddenly clothed with long grass and rushes, overtopped and surmounted by tall, spindly-looking trees, as the growth of Australian forests always seems to a new-comer.

"Here I drank, and let my horse drink as much as I considered prudent; then I filled my water-tin, and set about returning to my comrades. Many, I knew, would be already dead, but some might be alive, and the water would revive them. My expedition, however, was fruitless; I could in no way recover the trail, and my horse, whenever left to himself, always returned to the water. I was lost within three miles at most of the camp and my suffering comrades, and the more I tried to return, the more impossible I found it, and the more bewildered I became. Night drew on, and I was forced to lie down with my friends still unrelieved; and next day, and the next, the same thing happened, for I ran the risk of losing the water if I went too far away; and thus it was that I failed to find those for whom I sought. In that puzzling labyrinth of hills, even the

most expert backwoodsman would have found it difficult to make his way ; and to me, a new arrival, on my first expedition up the country, it was absolutely impossible. At last, I gave up the search, and waited some weeks for my horse to recover condition, subsisting myself on fowl, of which there were many kinds about, attracted thither by the water. I used to snare these, having resolved to keep my ammunition, in case I should fall in with black fellows, and need it to defend my life.

“There were none, however, near where I now was ; therefore, as soon as we were both sufficiently recruited, I loaded the horse with water and food for myself, adding some also for him, and we started again westwards. I did not need to carry water far, however, for the very first day we set out the rains began. Grass and water were to be met everywhere, and I pushed onwards briskly, anxious to reach settled country again before the wet weather ceased ; for, although there was the danger of floods sweeping us away, or fever and ague setting in, from constant exposure to wet, still

I had suffered too much from thirst to be willing to wait for drier weather, and run the risk of similar trials again. It would weary you to tell of the dangers of flooded creeks, and overwhelming torrents, rising as it were in an hour, sweeping everything before them, and carrying destruction and ruin in their path—these we have had to flee from, whilst the pursuing torrent seemed about to swallow us up—of the wily black fellows crouched in treacherous ambush, but flying from the report of a gun; of all the toils and perils that beset a traveller in the Australian bush—of all these I might tell you, and more—of the dreary oppressive loneliness, when you never hear the sound of human voice, never meet the friendly look of kindly human eye; when the dumb animal beside you becomes your confidant and friend, as over-awed by the solitude as you are yourself, as fearful of losing your companionship; of the weary footsore body, that the mind alone drags onward; of the mind at times almost fainting, but borne up by the hope of success and safety at last. Of all these I could tell you,

for I have felt them all ; but I would rather tell how the hope that lured me on, the strength that held me up, in the unequal strife of one man with solitude, danger, sickness, weariness, and, above all, the warring of the elements, was the thought of this meeting, that has at last repaid me tenfold for years of suffering.

“ When I reached the western coast at last, and made my way to Perth, I found that I was on the wrong side of the Continent for earning the competence I had fondly hoped I might gain ; still I could not afford to return, so I took employment as a stockman, and worked away at my new business diligently. I was on a run some little way up the country, and almost as utterly lonely as when I crossed the desert ; but my employer found me trustworthy, and gave me promotion from time to time, so that, having no inducement for spending money, I began to accumulate a little ; till at last, about five months ago, when I read the advertisement you hold in your hand, in the hotel in Perth (I had been sent to town on business of my master's), I had enough saved to pay a second-class

passage home; and as Mr. Merriton, my employer, had some business transactions he wished settled at Melbourne, he offered to pay my expenses there, if I would arrange matters for him and save his going himself, and from that port I could then sail direct to England. This I did, and you know the rest. After having surmounted so many perils—after having lived through so many trials, may we dare to hope we shall be happy at last?"

At length they parted for a few short hours; she turning with a full heart to communicate her happiness to Edythe Lenington, he wending his way to the Temple, to ascertain what the lawyer had to make known to him.

"You will have to prove your identity," the man of business said at last, after stating that, in case the person before him was the man he represented himself to be, by the death of his cousin, Van Vereker, who was killed out hunting the Winter before, he had stepped into a snug unencumbered property of over £4,000 per annum. "Of course you will be able to prove you are the right man?" asked the law-

yer keenly, looking at him with bright inquisitive eyes, shaded by long shaggy eyebrows.

"There will be no difficulty about that," answered Anstruther.

And there wasn't. His brother-officers identified him when he appeared before them, as Lady Lenington and Cecil had both done before. And so he came into possession of the fortune he had toiled and striven for in vain, without any exertion of his own.

In the meantime, the Marchioness had been overwhelmed by all that Cecil told her; but her thoughts dwelt longest and most kindly on the man who rested at last under the wild southern ocean—whose magnificent self-sacrifice had won happiness at last for the woman he loved.

THE END.

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